Let's go, Luke 4. We have a lot to do today. This is Jesus coming out of the water and beginning His ministry. Things have moved slow up until this point in our study of the book of Luke. In fact, we started in September, and here we are in February at chapter 4. So, it’s going to speed up now. There’ll be bigger blocks that we can deal with now that foundation is laid. But this is going to be the first sermon Jesus teaches. And it starts out really, really well, and the crowd really, really likes what it hears; and then they’re going to get angry. Let’s go. Verse 16, “And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.’” That is a messianic prophecy. That is a prophecy of the coming Messiah. So He just opens up and reads it—everybody would have known it. Now look at His play after that. Verse 20, “And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.” This is just a great scene to me. He opens up the scroll. He reads a messianic prophecy. He closes it, and then He just goes back and sits down. And everyone in the synagogue, they just kind of stare at Him. “Are You just going to read it?” No. He’ll expound on it. Here we go. Verse 21. “And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” What did He just claim? “I’m the Messiah.” So He’s in His hometown. He grabs the scroll of Isaiah, opens it up, reads a messianic prophecy, and then He just sits down. He waits for everyone to stare at Him and goes, “That’s Me.” Now, here’s where it gets interesting. You’ll hear all the time, “A prophet’s not honored in his hometown.” I’ve even said it before. After I got saved, I went to church at First Baptist Church of Texas City. And when I go back there and preach, I always get patted on my head no matter what I say, no matter how I preach. So I preach angry at First Texas City. When I go back there, we’re like in Lamentations, and I’m just mean and hate everyone in the room. And then even afterwards, they’re like, “Oh, that was so good. We love you.” And so I get on the plane and I’m like, “A prophet is not honored in his hometown.” I’ve even said it before. After I got saved, I went to church at First Baptist Church of Texas City. And when I go back there and preach, I always get patted on my head no matter what I say, no matter how I preach. So I preach angry at First Texas City. When I go down there, we’re like in Lamentations, and I’m just mean and hate everyone in the room. And then even afterwards, they’re like, “Oh, that was so good. We love you.” And so I get on the plane and I’m like, “A prophet is not honored in his hometown.” So I’ve even done it myself, but there’s something interesting here. I want you to see this. “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him... So there’s something that’s taking place before Jesus has to get into that a prophet cannot be honored in his hometown. Because right now, there seems to be honor there. Let’s keep reading. “And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is not this Joseph’s son?’” So you need to hear this in its context. They’re not going, “Oh, we don’t have to listen to this guy. He’s the carpenter’s son.” That’s not what’s taking place in this text. They’re saying, “How profound, how beautiful, how unbelievable is it that the one who is teaching with such authority—we know his background—we know his past, and he shouldn’t be able to do that. He’s not as one who is learned. He has not been trained. Is this not Joseph’s son?” This isn’t a slam on Jesus. And they’re marveling, and they’re excited about the fact that Jesus just said, “I am the Messiah.”

Now let’s get into a little of Israel’s history here. God comes to Abraham—Genesis 12—that’s how long ago—and says, “I’m going to make you a great and mighty nation. And then through this nation, through this people, I’m going to bless and it’s going to be big.” He says this is how big it’s going to be: “Like sand on the seashore.” I don’t know if you’ve been to the seashore—lot of sand. “Like the stars in the sky.” I don’t know if you’ve ever left the city, but when it gets night time, if you look up, it’s like there’s lights on up there. Just get out of the city; you’ll see what I’m talking about. They’re going to be like that. It’s going to be stars like that. That’s how big this people is going to be. And so what ended up happening, from that day forward—as the nation of Israel grew and grew, through slavery in Egypt on into the Promised Land—as
it grew and grew, there was an ethnocentric pride that began to build in them. They were going to be the ones. They were the hope of the world. They were the chosen people. And then what happened is this chosen people who is going to bless the world—if you read the Old Testament—they just keep getting overthrown a lot, don’t they? They just keep getting conquered. And so, there began to be a prophecy about a coming Messiah or a coming leader who was going to come and restore Israel to its rightful place. And so for these men and women—for Jesus to say, “I am, I’m here now to fulfill this”—here’s what they’re hearing: that, “Jesus has come, Joseph’s son is going to make those of us who are poor not poor anymore.” And they’re hearing, “Hey, Rome is oppressing us, but Jesus is going to come; and He’s going to make it so Rome doesn’t oppress us any longer.” And when they’re saying “us,” it’s not just Israel, but it’s the good people in Israel. Because there are some in Israel who like Rome. There are some who do not follow the Torah. Can you believe that? They’re not being obedient to the Laws of God. So the coming Messiah is about the exaltation of Israel but not all of Israel, just Israel who followed the rules well enough. So this is what they’re celebrating. “Yea, we’re not going to be poor anymore. Yea, Rome’s going to be overthrown.”

Now, here’s where it’s just going to go bad. Because so far, we’re doing well, aren’t we? I mean, Jesus the preacher—killing it. He’s reading the scroll. Everybody’s marveled. All this joy is taking place. I mean, if we’re grading Him, if we’re in seminary and grading Him in communication of the Gospel 101, we’re going, “Jesus is killing it.” And it’s going to go horribly, horribly wrong/right. Here we go. Verse 23. Here’s why you get that idea out of context when you go, “Oh, a prophet is without honor in his hometown.” Because that’s going to happen. Look at Jesus; He’s going to speak in a future tense. “And he said to them, ‘Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.”’” Oh, they are going to quote that, aren’t they—in about three years. “‘Physician, heal yourself.’” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” He hadn’t, that we know of, been to Capernaum yet. “And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.’” Now that’s just a weird jab there because they’ve got nothing but marvel and wonder for Him so far. Now watch. These two stories are going to infuriate the crowd, but they’re going to let us know something. Verse 25. “But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.” Now, He is quoting 1 Kings. He’s quoting a story out of 1 Kings, and here’s what He just said, “In a time that the entire region was in a severe famine and people were dying, specifically widows and children were dying, God chose to step in and save a widow; and she wasn’t an Israelite—she was a Phoenician.” He’s going to read another one; this one’s going to be out of 2 Kings 5. Look at this. “And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” And if you go back and read this story—it’s in 2 Kings 5—Naaman is a Syrian king. So all of Israel and the region is in some kind of pandemic. Leprosy is spreading. There’s whole colonies of lepers, and God extends mercy through the prophet Elisha to a foreign king. So they’re marveling. They’re going, “The Messiah’s here.” There’s great joy. “The Messiah’s here.” And then He goes on and says, “Okay yeah, but let me explain something real quick. It’s not going to look like you think it’s going to look.” Let’s finish the text. “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. Wrath is beyond being upset, is it not? They weren’t just offended. “And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.” This is just one of those cool moments that being the omnipotent Son of God pulls off for you. “But passing through their midst, he went away,” Do you know what that reminds me of? If you remember the old cartoons we watched—like when Bugs Bunny and Elmer Fudd get in a fight—there’s just that kind of cloud of dust, and then all of a sudden Bugs walks out; and Elmer’s fighting himself. You’ve got this massive crowd dragging Jesus out to the cliff, and then they get to the cliff; and they’re like, “Where is he?” He’s not there. From this moment on, everything He teaches, how He engages the culture around Him and how He lives out His life further evidences that the nation of Israel, particularly those who thought that the coming Messiah was simply about the nation of Israel being restored to a prominent role of power and having all their enemies destroyed—even the enemies within the nation who did not follow
God, destroyed—the life of Jesus evidences that they completely misunderstood what the coming Messiah and what the gospel of Jesus Christ was always about.

I think you could go on and on with how many of these are, but I’m just going to give you just four tonight, four of how it was different from how they thought. Number one. It was going to include peoples from all different ethnic backgrounds. Israel, being a chosen nation, should have brought humility and compassion for the world, and instead it brought arrogance and disdain. They hated the Samaritans. They hated the Phoenicians. They despised everyone around them. So now watch this. Remember what I said. From this moment on, Jesus is going to attack that idea. Think about the stories that Jesus tell over and over and over again. Here’s just some of them. Good Samaritan. Do you know the story of the Good Samaritan? The Levite, the holy priest of Israel, sees this man beat up and bleeding and passes him by. The priest comes by and sees a man beaten up and bleeding and passes him by. Who’s the hero of compassion in the story? The Samaritan—not the Jew—the Samaritan. I’m telling you, we’ll go through some of these—you’ll understand why they wanted Him dead. Another couple of them. There’s a story where Jesus heals ten lepers. There’s ten of them. He heals all ten of them, but He doesn’t do it like right in front of them. They’re actually leaving him, and they’re walking away. And when they’re a little distance away, Jesus heals them then—a little long-distance healing—how cool is that? And guess who comes back? Only one—the Samaritan leper comes back. You’ve got, in Mark 7, the Syrophoenician’s daughter. Jesus heals and says, “I’ve not seen faith like this in all of Israel.” You’ve got the parable of the tenants in Matthew 21:33-43 where Jesus tells the story of a vineyard that was owned by a great king, and he had workers on that vineyard. And he sent his son, the prince, to gather up the fruit of that vineyard, and when he got there, the workers rose up against the king’s son and killed him. What will the king of the vineyard do? And Jesus tells what he’s going to do. He’s going to throw the workers out, and he’ll get new workers in that will reap the benefits of the fruit of his vineyard. Do I need to unpack that or are you with me? So over and over and over again, Jesus is going to attack the ethnocentric view of the gospel that Israel possessed. The death of ethnocentric religion occurred the second Christ was born. It is over. Now what happens is each of our cultures gets to bring this really beautiful piece into a celebration of who God is. I think one of the most disheartening things I’ve seen as I’ve got to travel around the world and see different places is when white people have brought their culture, and specifically their culture of the gospel, to cultures that don’t celebrate that way. So you end up in Africa with a bunch of people in suits singing hymns—where everything else they do is very celebratory and loud and lengthy and long, and now they’re wearing a suit. It’s like 90°F outside, and they’re wearing a three-piece suit singing “Holy, Holy, Holy.” It’s like, “Um, I love the Presbyterians myself, but you might move on a little bit.” Have you ever wondered why the Old Testament is crammed filled with how worship is supposed to be, and the New Testament is nearly silent? Two chapters that I know of that address worship. Because it’s a missionary handbook; it fits into any culture. Which means that the Chinese—they’re going to bring something into the celebration of Christ that a bunch of upper-middle class white crackers ain’t going to bring. And the Africans, they’re going to bring something that we don’t have—probably rhythm, but whatever—we don’t have time. And on and on I could go. This ethnocentric idea of who the gospel is for and who Jesus is for, dies. It dies. Which is why we’ve got families in Africa and families in China, because this isn’t some ethnocentric, American God. Even long before we were even a country, this thing was thriving. He just killed it. It was very, very different than what they were expecting. They thought He was coming to exalt Israel. And that’s why Jesus is like, “Not all Abraham’s children are Israel.” Or, “I could make those rocks Israel if I want to”—which they probably didn’t enjoy.

Here’s the second shift. Not only was it going to include people from different ethnic backgrounds, it was also going to include people with dark pasts and current struggles. I tell these stories all the time. It’s one of my favorite pieces. Zaccheus, the tax collector, who was raising taxes to support a Roman army that had killed and slaughtered and wiped out most of Israel. The woman at the well who had had five husbands and was currently exchanging sex for rent. The woman caught in adultery in John 8. They drug her caught in the act and threw her at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus says, “Has no one condemned you, woman? Neither do I.” Remember what the accusation was? “The law says we pelt her
with rocks ‘til she dies. What do you say?” Jesus was accused over and over again of being a drunkard and a glutton. In Luke 15, He is accused by the Pharisees of sitting and being the friend of tax collectors and sinners. Now, this is a departure from how Israel viewed the coming of the Messiah. Because the coming of the Messiah signified the death and destruction of these people. They were outside the kingdom. They were outside. That God, in His goodness and His love, was not for these types of people. And who does Jesus sit with, eat with, walk with, preach to, encourage, heal? These people. And listen, when you’re a rule follower, and you figured out how to follow the rules well, the idea that God could love someone who doesn’t follow the rules as well as you do can be the most agitating thing in the world. And so it’s really easy to slip into judgment on other people when you’re a really good rule follower. You also really despise any kind of preaching that says there’s grace and mercy and love for those who don’t follow the rules as well as you do. It’s also why people get really, really, really excited about rules. But Jesus is going, “Zaccheus, we’re meeting at your house.” The woman at the well wiping His feet— “If you knew what kind of woman this was...” “I do know what kind of woman this is. I walked into your house. You didn’t give Me any bowl to wash with. You didn’t wash My feet.” They’re not a big fan of this idea—Israel’s not. They want them destroyed. Have you ever had anyone that you just didn’t want God to forgive and extend grace to? I’ll take that nervous chuckle as a confirmation. I’ll take that nervous chuckle as—sinner! We all are. Here’s one that kind of coincides. Not only is it going to be ethnically different than they thought, but it’s going to include people with dark pasts and even current struggles. One of my favorite things is to watch Jesus interact with Peter. And I know we joke around a lot about this relationship, but Peter is a guy who has a very difficult time grasping it. And he perpetually stumbles about and fumbles about, and every one of his mountaintops is followed immediately by a mountain. I mean, he doesn’t stumble off the mountain—he falls off a cliff. He doesn’t roll back down the mountain; he literally falls off the side of it. The big story: “You are the Son of God.” “Blessed are you, Peter. I’ve got to go die.” “Uh uh!” “Get behind Me, Satan.” That's falling off the cliff. These aren’t just people with dark pasts who now have figured out how to get it perfect; this is this perpetual, consistent grace even in the middle of current struggle. You’ve got to get that in your head. One of my fears, specifically for those of us who come to church a lot, is you get to hear a lot of the miraculous stories, and you get to hear a lot of stories of people who will speak of past difficulties that they now have freedom in. And that’s good and right, but I think there also needs to be a celebration of, “I’m currently struggling, and God is with me.” Because if we’re honest, that’s where the majority of us are. And even those who have whipped big sins that used to plague them, still find this law working inside of you; that what you desire to do, there’s something that wars against it. Here’s the next piece. Not only is it going to include people with dark pasts and current struggles, not only is it going to ethnically look much different than this church does—we’re working on it—but it was going to take root in the heart, not in right action alone. You see, at this day and time, the mantra was—and I mean both in this day and time and in this day and time—the mantra is: “the law, the law, the law, the law...” And Jesus shows up and says, “Hey, you’ve read in the law that you shouldn’t commit adultery. But I say if you look at every woman with lust, then you’ve committed the same sin.” That’s horrible. Because up until that point, I’m not guilty. “Thou shall not commit adultery,” No problem. “Don’t lust.” Uh oh! “You’ve heard it read in the law. I know you’ve read the law. You’ve heard it preached in the synagogue. ‘Don’t kill anyone.’ And everyone’s going, “I never killed anybody. I’m doing good. God loves me. I don’t cheat on my wife. I don’t kill anyone.” Jesus goes, “Okay, I get that. You’re doing well with your little disciplined actions, but what’s your heart asking you to do? Do you have lust in your heart? Do you have anger that leads to rage? You’re guilty.” Or Jesus says to the Pharisees, “You tithe well, but you neglect mercy and justice. Your external action? Good. Your heart? Not so good.” I hate this one. “Not just love your neighbor”—because I can love my neighbor—but, “love your enemies.” What? Because you see, I can love my neighbor. Rich and Martha are awesome. I can love them, invite them over to dinner—sometimes I even bring up their trashcan. Put a tract on it. No. I’m kidding—I don’t do that. Pick up their trash can. Set it there. Later, go, “Rich, got your trashcan, buddy.” I can love them; they’re great. But don’t ask me to love “such and such”—I’ll keep their name out of this one. I won’t name them. I don’t want to love them. I want Elijah’s power to call down fire. “Hold on
for a second. Let me back up. "Bam! I mean, I want that. I have asked for that gift, and rightly He has not given it to me.
Don’t ask me to love my enemies. Are you serious? Those who harm me? Those who wish harm of me? Those who talk
ever of me? I have to love them? That’s who I’m supposed to love? See, Jesus is just attacking the heart. He’s going, “Oh
no, no, no. This isn’t about doing; this is about being.” And to Israel, it was all about doing. “The law, the law, the law...
” Jesus goes, “Do the law all you want. Who are you?”

I know I’m going to get in trouble and get an e-mail for this, but I don’t answer e-mails—so let’s go. Four: it was not going
to be a political movement. Israel wanted this so bad. They wanted a government that would dictate a moral law that had
to be followed, and on more than one occasion they try to snatch up Jesus and make Him king. They try to grab Him
and make Him king. And Jesus will have nothing to do with it. If you remember one of the traps the Pharisees set for Him,
it was like, “Hey, Caesar says we’re supposed to pay taxes. What do you say?” And He’s like, “I don’t know. Who’s got a
dollar? Oh, who’s that? Oh, it’s George Washington. Alright, why don’t you give to George what’s George’s and give unto
Me that which is Mine?” Now I’m not in an election year trying to make any kind of political statement, but the gospel
has historically transformed lives; therefore transformed cultures—not had laws set for it so we would all live morally
the same. You cannot legislate transformed hearts. And so here’s the thing that frustrates me about the religious right.
I know I’m being recorded. And I know this will go out on the podcast to a bunch of people. Hey, out there. But I’ll tell
you this, just because I burn with it. Sometimes I just find this thing in me wanting so desperately for that block to shut
up and instead live out the gospel in their neighborhoods, in their workplaces—to live lovingly, and live graciously to a
post-Christian, fallen world in such a way that the gospel would take root in peoples lives, so that things would then be
transformed, instead of spending an unbelievable amount of money, time and energy trying to get it legislated. Now
I’m not saying that we should not be active politically. That’s not what I’m saying. We have a responsibility as citizens of
this nation to do what is our civic duty. And there’s nothing wrong with electing God-fearing, Spirit-filled, Bible-believing
men, but you’re not going to legislate Christianity. You’re not. Jesus wasn’t going to do it. Jesus did not go, “Here’s the
answer to a fallen world: I’ll overthrow Rome, set into being a Christian nation, and there we’ll overcome the world.”
That’s going to happen about 100 years from now in Constantine, and then what happens just a little bit after that?
Rome ceases to exist. I look forward to not reading your e-mails.

Now, Jesus is saying that with His coming, a radically new way of defining the people of God is being set into motion. It’s
no longer going to be defined by ethnicity. It’s no longer going to be defined by one’s past or present struggles. It is not
going to be defined by some government setup. Like, one of the funny things about Asia is they just think—I think most
of the world thinks this way—they think all Americans are Christians. “Oh, you’re American. You’re Christian.” It’s not
going to be defined by socioeconomic status. It’s not going to be defined by intellect. It’s going to be defined by faith in
Christ alone. And faith in Jesus is going to trump ethnicity. It’s going to trump past. It’s going to trump present struggles.
It’s going to trump the weight of the law, and it’s going to go well beyond governed religion. So let’s read again how
they handle this. Verses 28-30, “When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.” Why do you
think that would be? Why is this such bad news? I’ll tell why I think this is bad news here in a minute. “And they rose up
and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could
throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.” What did He go away to do? Establish the
gospel. What does that mean? Look back up in verse 18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed
me to proclaim good news to the poor.” In the coming of Jesus Christ, He’s going to teach almost immediately, “Blessed
are the poor...blessed are the poor...blessed are the poor...blessed are the poor...blessed are the actual poor...”
Now why? Because when you’re in need, when you don’t know where lunch is going to come from, when difficulty upon
difficulty is thrown upon you, you seek the Lord and find Him well. Honestly, when is it easier to fall on your face and in
humility cry out to God? When everything you have is working well? Let’s be honest. Isn’t it a rare thing for everything
to go well and us to be sitting at dinner with good wine and good food and good friends, money in the bank, children
behaving, getting along with our spouse and all of a sudden being overwhelmed with gratitude for all that? I mean, it
happens, but isn’t it rare? Most of the time, aren’t we just by default going, “This is what I expect. I had this coming to me.” Absolutely. But you let it go dark. You let it go bad. You let us have a need—we get on our face in a hurry.

Look at this next one and I want to talk about it because I’m horrible at it. “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives...” I struggle with this, and I’ll tell you why. He continues to say, “…to set at liberty those who are oppressed...” It’s like the same thing that’s read backwards. So Lauren and I have talked about this at length. I’m like, “So what’s do you think the difference is? It sounds like it’s saying the same exact thing here.” And this is my wife’s insight—it’s why I married her, because I have to preach every week—I need help. And she’s gorgeous and loves me, but anyway I don’t have time. Here’s what I think He’s saying here in this first part. “He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives...” In this scenario, in this time period and in this time period, who is it that’s held captive? If I look at the New Testament time period, this 1st century time period, and I read through the story of Jesus, do you know who’s held captive? The Pharisees. That’s who’s held captive. The law has captured them. That’s who’s held captive. All they know is the law, the law, the law. They know nothing of relationship. They know nothing of freedom. They know nothing of joy. They know only a rugged disciplined, painful, behavioral pattern that the testament lays out. And this is why Jesus, over and over again, is going to say to them, “Hey, you study the Scriptures in vain because you think that in them you have life. You don’t find life in there. You find life in Me. And yet you refuse to come to Me whom those Scriptures testify about.” He calls them a brood of vipers, white-washed tombs. And don’t read that wrong because I don’t think that’s Jesus giving them the whatnot. I think He’s filled with sorrow for these people. And here’s what I meant I’m not good at this. It seems like in this new kind of missional movement that’s occurring in churches that everybody gets grace but the religious guy. I mean, isn’t he deceived too? Isn’t he wounded and hurt too? Why doesn’t he get grace? I know he’s a jerk. So are you, just in a different area. And so for me, like you get a guy who’s just had a dark, wicked, horrible past, and I’m like patient and loving. But if you get that like 22-year-old hyper-Calvinist—my hope is that God has predetermined to destroy him. That’s what I find happening in me. I’m like, “Oh yeah, no, I know Ephesians 1 well. Before the foundation of the world my hope is that He set into motion your death.” So why is it that we’ve got all this grace for people who struggle, but the religious guy, the guy who’s got like 13 fish on the back of his car and like, “CSI: Christ Saving Individuals,” on his bumper sticker—somebody put that on my car, so that’s why I know that one is a little practical joke—that guy gets no grace from us. He gets no love—it’s dead orthodoxy. And I’m telling you, those people have been held captive, and Christ goes, “Here’s why I came, to set them free.” And this is why in the parable of the prodigal son that says that he pleaded with the older brother who was outside and wouldn’t come in to party. He went out there and pleaded with him, “You’re missing it. You’re missing it. You’re missing it.” Liberty to the captives. And I’ll explain liberty to the oppressed here in a minute.

Recovering sight is what Jesus is going to bring in the gospel. I don’t know that you can get through life without being hurt and wounded by something. You know, daddy didn’t hug you well enough. And it’s really not your daddy’s fault. Dr. Hannah was here this week for a pastor’s conference. He told a great story about his wife when she was sixteen—mowed the lawn, trying to surprise her daddy, and she left this one little strip undone. And when her daddy got home, he re-mowed the whole lawn. But he was a very loving man and loved her and encouraged her, but in that one instant, the devil grabbed that, just grabbed that; and now she can’t do it well enough. Just that one little thing, despite all this evidence to the contrary. So getting hurt, and getting wounded—it messes up your sight so you can’t see. So then what ends up happening is you don’t want to forgive because if you forgive, you’re going to let them off the hook. And you can’t let them off the hook—never being able to see that the only one you’re really hurting is you. Or getting bitter and angry and wanting vengeance, never being able to see that the only soul that’s being tore up is yours. And so Jesus goes on and on—“I’m going to give you eyes to see.”

“Liberty to the oppressed.” Liberty to the captives are those hyper-religious people who find their worth in religion and doing rather than in knowing Christ and being. And I think liberty to the oppressed is people who are being pressed hard
by the law, who have over them leaders and teachers who would say, “You had better do this...you had better do this...you had better do this...” And they’ve tried so long to do this and do this and do this, and they couldn’t. And so they felt like God had no love for them, had no grace for them, had no mercy for them because they just couldn’t get it right, and so they walked away.

He was going to proclaim the Lord’s favor. The Lord’s favor is a peculiar thing, is it not? Like, if we talked honestly and openly, most of us would have a very difficult time with the reality that there’s this real deep pleasure in the heart of God for us right now. It’s not a stretch for us to believe that God loves us in the future, because we’re going to do better, aren’t we? I heard this illustration, and I loved it. What if you knew that in order for your kid to not fall over anymore but be able to run free and strong, he was going to have to fall down fifteen times—I mean horrific, fifteen—I mean—bam—like blood, teeth, ear fell off—I mean, bad. Fifteen times he was going to fall and bust, but then after that fifteenth time, he’d never fall again. I think two things would occur every time he fell. One would be the hurt of the fall, but the second thing would be a joy in knowing, “Only fourteen more. Only thirteen more. Only twelve more. Only one more year. Only three more years. Only one more fall.” The favor of the Lord. You see, the thing that’s driving all of our doing instead of being is when you strip away all of our correct language, we still don’t believe that God loves us because of the cross of Jesus Christ and the shed blood. We haven’t by faith embraced that. We can embrace that God loves, but God loves those who do well. Isn’t that what we really believe? Not that God loves us right now. Very few people buy that. The people who buy that are annoying to be around. They are. I mean, they’re just happy and content. It just makes me sick. They’re able to say no. They’re quick to confess their faults and failings. They tend to rejoice well even in their failures. You know, like biblical Christians. It’s horrible. But most of us don’t buy that. Honestly, most of us believe that we’ve got to do these things in order for there to be any real pleasure of God in us. We’ve got to read our Bible daily. And we’ve got to pray every day, and we’ve got to do that and do this and we’ve got to do these things and that’s how we get the Lord’s favor, by being a good Christian, which biblically there’s no definition of. There can’t be a definition of that, because either by faith you’ve embraced the righteousness of Christ, or you haven’t. And that’s why you’re seeing so many men and women here in Dallas who we’re baptizing who get in the water with this testimony: “I grew up in church, and then I walked away. I didn’t know the gospel. I’m back.” I mean, probably 80% of the people that we’ve baptized over the last five years have got in the water with that testimony. “I grew up in church. I never knew the gospel. I knew quiet time. I knew, ‘Don’t cuss.’ I knew, ‘Don’t go see Terminator 2. It will mess up your mind. Garbage in, garbage out.’ I knew, ‘Don’t listen to secular music.’ That’s what I knew. Nobody told me about imparted righteousness.” Easy to press in and love a God who you believe has an infinite amount of pleasure in you. If my daughter thinks I’m angry at her, do you know what she does? She hides. But if she knows she going to walk in the room and I’m going to be like, “Look at that! Get a camera!” If she knows that there’s going to be this implicit joy in me when I see her, then she wants to sit by me. She wants to sit on my lap. She wants to tell me about her day. She wants to walk with me. Do you think that’s some kind of a coincidence, or do you think maybe God’s trying to communicate something? I know—narrow is the path, and few get it. It’s frustrating.

Let’s pray. “Jesus, I thank You for being able to get together, and open up Luke 4 and watch You deconstruct religion. Watch You deconstruct an idea of one ethnicity being greater than another. Watch You deconstruct the law. Watch You tear apart the idea that this is for good, perfect people. Watch You blow up the idea that this movement’s political, and then instead, You’re here to preach good news to the poor. So I know there's some in here tonight, and they have a wrong view of the gospel too. They think it’s not for them—it’s for good people. It’s for this kind of person; it’s for this kind of person. I just pray that You would meet them where they are tonight and take away all their excuses. I thank You that You’re here to set the captives free tonight. So I pray for those who have come in with just a religious spirit. They just do church well, but they don’t really have a relationship with You. They don’t really walk in any freedom, and they aren’t really moved with love toward You and for You—just instead of perpetually doing. And I know there are men and women in here who grew up in a kind of church that is nowhere in Your Scriptures, and men and women threw heavy burdens on them, burdens they could never live up to. I thank You that You’ve come to remove those. I praise You that tonight You
declare Your favor. And the narrow path existing is not about only a few who will be able to do this well. Instead, it’s only a few who will be able to imagine and grasp this kind of love. So help us with that. Help us, Jesus. Thank You for Your first sermon. I pray that You just keep preaching it over us. It’s for Your beautiful name. Amen.”