

OUR LORD'S FIRST SERMON A Lesson in Dispensational Truth

By Richard Jordan

“And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about.

“And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all” (Luke 4:14, 15).

As He entered into His public ministry, our Lord began to show His beloved nation how to “rightly divide the Word of truth” and thus to understand just where they stood in the program of God. Notice how this is demonstrated in His first recorded sermon:

“And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read.

“And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias” (Luke 4:16,17).

Having found the passage we know as Isaiah 61:1,2, we should take careful note of just how much of the passage He read—and why.

“ ... And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written,

“The Spirit of the Lord *is* upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised,

“To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

“And he closed the book, and he gave *it* again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him” (Luke 4:17-20).

If you will turn to Isaiah 61:1,2 you will quickly see why He had their undivided attention. He had stopped reading and *closed the book* right in the middle of the sentence! But *why*? The answer to this question points up *the importance of dividing the Word of truth*.

Our Lord had *divided* the Word right in the middle of the sentence for a very obvious reason. Look at the next verse in Luke 4 carefully.

“And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears” (v. 21).

Indeed, the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him. He *had* anointed Him “to preach the gospel to the poor.” He *had* sent Him “to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” and “to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.” But—had he continued reading to the end of the sentence He could not have said,

“... This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears,” (v.21) for the verse in Isaiah goes on to read:

“... and the day of vengeance of our God”(Isaiah 61:2).

“The acceptable year of the Lord” had indeed come and the Lord was there among His people proclaiming the good news. He *stopped* reading and “closed the book” in the place He did, however, because “the day of vengeance of our God” had not yet come. Thus our Lord began His ministry demonstrating Himself to be a dispensationalist, carefully rightly dividing the Word.

Nor did He, by rightly dividing Isaiah 61:2, set aside as untrue the last part of the verse. Later He warns Israel of the consequence of rejecting Him and their opportunity to receive the long promised blessing of God on the nation—“the acceptable year of the Lord”—pointing out the dire results:

“For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.
“But woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck, in those days! for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people” (Luke 21:22,23).

It was because this good news was to be rejected by Israel that Isaiah had gone on to predict “the day of vengeance of our God.” And reject, they did, demanding His crucifixion. John 19:15 records:

“But they cried out, Away with *him*, away with *him*, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.”

This, according to prophecy, was to be followed by the pouring out of God’s wrath (Psalm 2:1-5; 110:1). Hence Peter—another dispensationalist—stood at Pentecost and, quoting Joel 2:28,29, warned that “the great and terrible day of the Lord” was ahead for them, and gave them a renewed opportunity of repentance.

Joel’s prophecy basically predicted two things: first, the pouring out of God’s Spirit upon His own and, then, the pouring out of His wrath upon His enemies. The former, as Peter said, took place at Pentecost, but not the latter. The Spirit *was* poured out but the wrath of God was—and is still—yet to come. The prophetic program has been interrupted. Again, we must rightly divide the Word.

The reason for the interruption is not difficult to find: Rather than destroying, He *saved* Saul of Tarsus, the leader of the rebellion against Him (I Timothy 1:13-16), and commissioned him to proclaim “the gospel of the grace of God” (Ephesians 3:1-3) under which we live today.

The “acceptable year of the Lord” ended for the nation Israel with her rejection of her risen, glorified Lord. But rather than respond immediately in wrath and vengeance, God Himself has temporarily *interrupted* the prophetic program, holding back “the day of vengeance,” all because He had an unprophesied, *secret* purpose to unfold regarding the Body of Christ, a company of believers to be saved by grace through faith alone and given a *heavenly* position and prospect.

We should be ever so grateful that our Lord closed the book just where He did—and that He has not yet opened it again to proclaim “the day of vengeance of our God”! Already the dispensation

of grace has lasted over 1900 years! Such is God's longsuffering to a Christ-rejecting world. And what is their response to such gracious forbearance? Solomon wrote:

"Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

The wrath *has* been delayed—but this in no wise means it is not real! Little wonder Paul so pointedly says:

"Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God" (Romans 2:4,5).

Paul understood that the delay in the outpouring of God's wrath would not last forever—he, too, was a dispensationalist! Every additional day is *a day of grace*—of unmerited favor from God. No unsaved person should put off trusting Christ this very moment.

And surely this is why Ephesians 5:15-17 exhorts believers:

"See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise,

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

"Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*."

Christ, Peter and Paul each clearly understood the principle of rightly dividing the Word of truth. *Do you?* This is the only way to understand and enjoy the Bible—and to live in obedience to it.