

Introduction

Early chapters of the Gospels share various aspects of Jesus Christ's divine mission: Messianic prophecies, glorious birth, precocious youth, exemplary baptism and the spread of gospel truths. Christ was not to be alone in his mission, however, except in his suffering. So we turn to the events surrounding Christ's public proclamation of his mission, the call of the Twelve Apostles, and the preparation they received to follow in his footsteps. What we will see in these chapters is that Christ taught his apostles by example how to be true disciples engaged in the work of righteousness.

Christ Publicly Proclaims His Messianic Mission

Let us begin by listening to Luke's testimony. As chapter 4 opens we find Jesus in a mighty spiritual exercise of fasting for forty days and nights. After masterfully overcoming diverse forms of temptations, he was endued ((Endued, or endowed, comes from the Greek term *enduo*, which means "to clothe.")) with spiritual power and returned to Galilee to proclaim his ministry.

On one particular Sabbath he gathered at the synagogue ((The term "synagogue" derives from the Greek term *sunagoga*), which means "assembly, congregation, gathering." The synagogue was "the meeting place and prayer hall of the Jewish people since antiquity. During later Second Temple times [c. 580 BC – 70 AD] the term 'synagogue' referred both to a group of people and/or a building or institution. Although these notions are not mutually exclusive, it is quite probable that at its inception the synagogue did not refer to an actual building but to a group or community of individuals who met together for worship and religious purposes.... By the 1st century [AD] the synagogue had become so important and central an institution to Jewish life in Palestine that the Talmud of Palestine refers to 480 of them existing in Jerusalem at the time of Vespasian [c. 70 AD].... Josephus [the ancient Jewish author and historian who lived from 37 AD – 105 AD] also emphasizes the centrality of the reading of Scripture and the importance of study found in the Second Temple synagogue.... The [New Testament] corroborates such a picture in reporting Jesus' and Paul's frequent visitations to synagogues. During those times they would invariably read or expound Scripture.... The origin of the synagogue is shrouded in mystery, though most scholars would place its beginning in exilic times.... It was the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in 587/6 [BC] and the forced eviction of Judeans to Babylonia that created the conditions which brought about a complete reappraisal of life.... Another aspect of the life crisis facing the Judeans in exile was the question of how to worship without a sanctuary located on a holy place.... Whatever the reality of the situation in exile, the fact of the matter is that the response to Cyrus' edict in 538 [BC] permitting the Judeans to return to Palestine was underwhelming. Many chose to stay in the Persian diaspora and such a decision clearly indicates that their religious needs were being met.... Whatever the case may be for an exilic date for the idea or actual establishment of the synagogue as a place where individuals gathered to worship, read, or recite the scriptures, and to venerate [God], the experience and trauma of the destruction and exile of God's people enabled the Judeans to develop a means of approaching God that transcended the confines of sacred space." *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:251-252.)) with other Jews in his boyhood town of Nazareth to read and expound upon the scriptures as was the custom. When the scrolls came to where Jesus was seated, he stood, opened to a passage in Isaiah ((Luke quotes from Isaiah 61:1-2. In the Lukan gospel, the name of Isaiah is written as "Esaias." We remember that Luke was like a gentile, educated in the Greek educational system and he was probably writing to a Greek speaking audience. More than likely the version of the Old Testament that Luke referred to was the Greek Septuagint (often symbolized with the Latin numbers for seventy as LXX). Hence, Isaiah's name was written in Greek as "Esaias." We shouldn't be surprised however, for even Isaiah today would not recognize his own name pronounced in English, since "Isaiah" is simply the English version of the Hebrew name "*yeshayahu*." According to tradition, the Septuagint (LXX) was translated by Jews from Hebrew into Greek around 275 BC in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. For Greek speaking Jews (and later for Greek speaking Christians) the Septuagint (LXX) became the standard Old Testament version, much like the King James Version is the standard Old Testament version for English speaking Mormons.)) and in great solemnity read a Messianic prophecy.

Let us look for a moment at the Messianic prophecy that Jesus read, comparing Luke's version with Isaiah's. A careful examination of these two passages will reveal powerful insights to Christ's purpose and ministry. Isaiah is

on the left (with differences highlighted in italics) and Luke is on the right (with differences highlighted in italics).

Isaiah 61:1-3

1 The Spirit of the Lord *GOD* is upon me; because *the LORD* hath anointed me to preach *good tidings unto the meek*; he hath sent me to *bind up* the brokenhearted, to *proclaim liberty* to the captives, and *the opening* of the prison to them that are *bound*;

2 To *proclaim* the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;

3 To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.

Luke 4:18-19

18 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*,

19 To *preach* the acceptable year of the Lord.

Commentary on Luke & Isaiah

In verse one of Isaiah 61, the reference to deity is “Lord God,” ((In the Old Testament any reference to “Lord God” is written in the Hebrew as *Adonai Jehovah*. *Jehovah*, or more precisely, *Yahweh*, was the divine name not to be uttered.)) whereas in Luke’s version it is simply “Lord.” At first take, we may think that such a small change is of no importance, but this one is. Consider for a moment the Jewish prohibition against uttering the divine name of God. According to the New Testament, Jews during the time of Jesus were quite particular about blasphemy, a sin they said was punishable by death. Even the mere mention of God’s name could be grounds for blasphemy. Well, then, how did one avoid getting himself killed while reading the scriptures in the synagogue, particularly when the great prophet Isaiah wrote out in entirety the name “Lord God”? One simply said, as Jesus appropriately did in the synagogue, “Lord” (*Adonai*) instead of “Lord God” (*Adonai Jehovah*).

The other changes in the accounts are also quite significant and mutually support each other in a rich expression of gospel truths. Look at the way that the changes are different yet parallel and complimentary. Again, the Isaiah version is on the left, while Luke’s parallel statements are on the right:

Isaiah 61:1	Luke 4:18
Good tidings	Gospel
Meek	Poor
Bind up	Heal
Proclaim liberty	Preach deliverance
	Recovering of sight to the blind
The opening of the prison	Set at liberty
Bound	Bruised
Proclaim	Preach

What we notice here is that Jesus is keeping with the spirit of Isaiah's message yet slightly altering the words to give additional depth and richness to express his merciful mission of loving kindness. One aspect that Jesus did add, which is not found in the Isaiah passage, is mention of giving sight to the blind. This Christ did, and not just in physical terms, though he did that as well (see for example Matt. 9:27-31; Mark 8:22-26). Christ also came to heal spiritual blindness. He came to open our eyes to our own weaknesses that by seeing them we might be free through repentance and the purging fire of forgiveness (see Ether 12:27).

Let us now return to the account of Christ publicly announcing himself in the synagogue. He finished reading the Isaiah passage, which we explored above, and what happened next is riveting:

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. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? (Luke 4:20-22)

The immensity of what was announced was beyond the comprehension or acceptance of those in that synagogue of Nazareth that day. Jesus was but a carpenter's son in an obscure Galilean village on the fringes of the enormous Roman Empire. How could the long anticipation of mighty prophetic fulfillment come to one that was so...so meek?

Perceiving their unbelief, Jesus continued to speak, but in parables. He also reminded them that "no prophet is accepted in his own country" (Luke 4:24) and he likened himself to the great healing, preaching and miracle prophets of Old Testament times, namely Elijah ((*Elias* is the Greek form of the name "Elijah." This is again evidence that Luke writes in Greek and/or his audience reads Greek and that they use as their standard Old Testament the Greek Septuagint (LXX).)) and Elisha. ((*Eliseus* was the Greek form of the name "Elisha.")) These two prophets also were persecuted and not well accepted even among their own people. In fact, some of their greatest works had been done among the "gentiles." For example, Elijah ensured that a Sidonian widow would have enough to eat during a famine; Elisha healed the leprosy of Syrian Naaman. Despite opposition and rejection from their own people to whom they were to minister, these two Israelite prophets were true to their commission from God and they were rewarded with the blessings of heaven.

Not one word of truth penetrated the hearts of Jesus' listeners. In wrath they rose up against Jesus to destroy him. But like Nephi in the Book of Mormon (Helaman 10:16) he was conveyed out of their midst. And taking his journey he went "to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught [the willing] on the sabbath days" (Luke 4:31).

Christ's Ministry in the Galilee

With great haste and excitement the message went abroad, "We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). Though some doubted, like the Jews of Nazareth, with such words as, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46), the enthusiasm for the promised Messiah could not be abated for with joyful shouts of "come and see! come and see!" he was proclaimed. ((John 1:46, slightly modified and twice repeated.))

The crowds pressed upon him, both to hear his precious words and to be close to this source of healing. At one point Jesus had to use Peter Simon's fishing boat to launch himself off the shore of the Sea of Galilee in order to teach the thronging multitudes. This set the context for the formal calling of some of his Apostles, disciples which had been with him in his early ministry and had beheld his marvelous works of everlasting kindness and mercy.

Calling His Apostles

Ever the master teacher, Christ employed the seemingly mundane tasks of life as symbols of powerful principles

and ideas. For example, to weary fisherman he urged them to cast forth their nets even though they had toiled throughout the night without success. To the amazement of all, their nets gathered in schools of fish to the point of their nets breaking.

Some see this story as a symbol that Peter and the other future apostles were not yet capable of spreading the Gospel message entirely on their own. Then later, after several years of divine training with Christ, they could cast out their nets and bring in until overflowing without the nets breaking (see John 21). They were then ready to successfully take the message to the world.

When the fishermen-disciples saw the bounteous miracle of the fishes they were filled with amazement. In simple, yet profoundly symbolic words Christ said to them, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10). It required nothing more than to return to land for these devout men to forsake all and follow the Master (see Luke 5:11). What a marvelous example these simple men set. No sooner had they experienced one of the greatest success stories of their lives that they were asked in plain humility to forsake it *all* and they did so *willingly*.

The Tutoring Begins

Christ taught by example. His Apostles had been called to serve and live as he did, thus Christ tutored them through his daily acts of loving kindness and spiritual self-mastery. For example, soon after Peter, Andrew, James and John received their call to the Apostleship, Christ displayed his loving power to heal a man beset with the socially and physically debilitating disease of leprosy (Luke 5:12-15). Then Christ retired to a secluded spot to pass the night in prayer (Luke 5:16). Through this simple act of worship, Christ taught his disciples that even the mighty Lord had need for communion with the Father. Indeed, prayer may have been a source for Christ's healing power.

As his ministry progressed opportunities to physically and spiritually heal those who came to him were inextricably interwoven with the great work of teaching the people. All of this served as the tutoring context for his chosen Apostles as they accompanied him. With masterful grace, Christ answered the doubting and probing questioning from scribes and Pharisees who ever sought to find fault with the one who could save them from their faults, if they would but be willing. For example, after telling a man with palsy that his sins were forgiven, Christ posed a question to the scribes and Pharisees, "Does it require more power to forgive sins than to make the sick rise up and walk?" (JST Luke 5:23). Christ answered his own question for these doubters by showing that he had power to do both. Under the command of God on earth and in the sight of all present, the palsy leapt from his bed. Christ does have all power both in heaven and on earth to heal.

In this manner did Christ tutor his Apostles. By example he taught them that they were to show mercy, to heal, to teach, to liberate and to protect.

Physician for the Sick

Levi, also known as Matthew, was a publican, a tax collector. ((Perhaps Mathew was collecting customs duties or taxes as a customs agent at the nearby provincial border.)) If Christ was attempting to win popular Pharisaic and scribal opinion, he certainly chose poorly with Matthew as an apostle and the opportunity soon arose for the self-righteous to make their opinion known. "Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?" they complained to Christ (Luke 5:30). In a rebuke that was both gentle yet stinging he replied, "They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-31). In many of these interactions Christ's Apostles were silent, yet careful observers of the Lord's ministering work. There time was not yet, but soon would be when they would have to answer similar inquiries from those that believed they had nothing to learn from the meek and chosen servants of God. But for the time being, they were under the tutelage of the Master of heaven and earth.

The Ancient Apostles

Now who were these men that Christ especially chose? Let us pause for a moment to review the names of those

called to be special ministers for Christ's name in the dispensation of the Meridian of Times. According to the book of Matthew the following are the names of the Twelve:

1. Simon (also called Peter)
2. Andrew (brother to Peter)
3. James (son of Zebedee)
4. John (brother to James and son of Zebedee)
5. Philip
6. Bartholomew
7. Thomas
8. Matthew (the publican)
9. James (son of Alphaeus)
10. Lebaeus (also called Thaddaeus & also called Judas)
11. Simon (the Canaanite, also known as Simon the Zealot)
12. Judas (Iscariot)

The Ministry of Apostleship

We will end our present study by reviewing the apostolic commission set forth by Christ in Matthew chapter 10. The work that Christ ordained these men to undertake was by no means an easy task and it certainly was not bedazzled with the glory of this world.

Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. And ye shall be hated of all *men* for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:9-10, 16-18, 22, 28)

However, the peace of Christ's spirit was to ever accompany them and the blessings of joy in this life and eternal joy in the life to come was the sure promise that Christ bestowed upon his Apostles as they set forth to accomplish their mighty tasks. They would not be left alone.

But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. And fear not....Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. (Matthew 10:19-20, 28-31, 38-39)

The Apostles received a specific commission to follow in the footsteps of the Savior's ministry. In so doing they would be blessed with the same power he had.

Go...to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received,

freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. And when ye come into an house, salute it. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. (Matthew 10:6-13)

Conclusion

The Apostles are special ministers of Christ's name unto all the world. Their commission has ever been the same throughout the ages of the world. And those who take upon themselves the name of Christ are invited to participate in sustaining that marvelous apostolic commission:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)