

THE HOLE IN OUR GOSPEL

SIX-WEEK QUEST

SERMON OUTLINE I

WHAT IS THE HOLE?

LUKE 4:14-21

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Have you ever packed to travel somewhere and then had a sinking feeling that you'd forgotten something?

According to Volumebuy.com, the top ten things people forget when they travel are:

- Tickets
- Passport
- Extra Socks
- Underwear
- The Right Kind of Shoes
- Cash
- Medication
- Important Contact Numbers
- Toothbrush
- I.D. tags on your baggage

Pastor: If you have a humorous story about forgetting something or someone, tell it here.

Probably most of us here can tell a story about going on a business trip, camping trip, or vacation and forgetting to pack something pretty important. Many youth ministers can even tell you a story about forgetting a kid at a gas station. When enough time passes, they can turn out to be pretty funny stories. But there is another journey we are taking, and if you forget something on this journey, it's not so funny.

INTENSIFY THE ISSUE

In your faith journey, has there been a time—maybe even now—when you have felt like you have forgotten something? Or maybe you feel like something was missing? You think to yourself, "There has got to be more to the Christian life than this." Have you ever felt like the gospel you have experienced was incomplete – like there was a hole in it?

Pastor: Describe (if you honestly can) how you have felt this way and what caused it.

This sermon series, The Hole in Our Gospel, looks to see if we might be forgetting something in our faith journey. It asks, "What does God expect of us?" Are we missing something that He expects of us?

This is what we will be exploring the next six weeks as we patch up the hole in our gospel and discover what it means to live the "whole" (w-h-o-l-e) gospel.

Now let's be clear. The gospel isn't missing something. Quite the contrary! We've been missing something that's in it. It's been there all along; we just missed it or forgot it.

This isn't a problem that is new to us or our generation. 700 years before the birth of Jesus, people were missing something vital to the heart of God, and God made it clear what he expects.

In Micah 6:8 it says, "He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Jesus also saw this hole in the faith of the religious leaders of his day. It's hard not to imagine that he had this Micah passage in mind when He said... "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law—justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former." Matthew 23:23

Did you hear the three things these two passages had in common? 1. Justice, 2. Mercy, 3. Faithfulness (walk humbly with God).

Keep these three things in mind as we look at today's text, which happens to be Jesus' first sermon.

INSTRUCT WITH THE BIBLE

CONTEXT: Jesus' first sermon, which you can find in Luke 4, explains why He came. In today's language, we would call it His mission statement.

Let's set the scene. Jesus has returned to His hometown. It's the Sabbath day, and He goes to the synagogue. Men and their sons are sitting on backless benches, and in the balcony are wives, daughters, and sisters. In the front of the room are a row of elders. One of them, the attendant, gets up. He speaks briefly. He then asks Jesus to read the scriptures. Jesus gets up and walks to the middle of the room where there is a raised desk, kind of like a podium. People are excited to hear from Jesus because all sorts of amazing stories have been circulating about this "hometown boy."

There was first a reading from the Law, and then one from the Prophets. The attendant carried a heavy scroll to the podium and handed it to Jesus to read from the Prophets. It was a scroll containing the writings of the prophet Isaiah. The scroll contained no chapter or verse divisions like our Bibles do now. Jesus came to the passage that we call Isaiah 61:1-2. He began to read in a way that sounded different than the other religious leaders. He read as if He was reading about himself.

Let's read this passage, starting with verse 14.

Read Luke 4:14-21

14 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."

This passage specifically names five things about Jesus' mission. He came to:

- Preach good news to the poor.
- Proclaim freedom for the prisoner.
- Give sight to the blind.
- Release the oppressed.
- Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

You'll see in a moment that these mission statements have a spiritual meaning and a literal meaning. In fact, all of them have a spiritual meaning. And on the literal side, some focus on mercy and others on justice.

In the book, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, Richard Stearns suggests that Jesus' mission covered three huge realms – the spiritual, the physical, and the social. They happen to correspond perfectly with the two passages we read earlier about faithfulness, mercy, and justice. Let's take a look at each of these realms in Jesus' mission.

1. THE WHOLE GOSPEL INCLUDES THE SPIRITUAL

Micah called this "walking humbly with your God." Jesus called it "faithfulness."

For the most part, this is the realm we most easily recognize in Jesus' mission. We haven't forgotten this part of the gospel. But let's explore it a bit.

Jesus came to "preach good news to the poor." People thought that being rich was a sign of God's favor and being poor was a sign of God's judgment. Jesus came to tell the poor that there was good news: that God loved them. The spiritually poor could be spiritually rich.

Jesus came to "proclaim freedom for the prisoner." The spiritual meaning of this is that Jesus came to release people captured in sin.

Jesus came to "give sight to the blind." The physically blind were thought to be blind because of some sin they or their parents had committed. The religious leaders believed they were spiritually condemned. Also, Jesus referred to the religious leaders as "blind" in a spiritual sense (Matthew 15:14; 23:16, 17, 19, 24, 26). Jesus came to give the spiritually blind spiritual sight.

Jesus came to "release the oppressed." People are spiritually broken by their own sin and by the sins done to them. Jesus came to release them from that spiritual brokenness.

Jesus came to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." This phrase is a reference to the Old Testament Year of Jubilee. The Law of Moses required that every 50 years, slaves were to be freed and all debts cleared. Everyone had a clean slate. In a spiritual sense, Christians depend on this. Jesus said our sin is like a debt we owe to God, a debt so large, we could never pay it back. So God forgives our debt. We get a clean slate. Jesus came to establish an age of grace.

2. THE WHOLE GOSPEL INCLUDES THE PHYSICAL

Micah and Jesus also referred to this as "mercy."

Many Christians are merciful, but others have relegated the gospel to only the spiritual realm. But the gospel includes being merciful to others in very practical, tangible, and immediate ways. For some people this is where the hole in their gospel begins to appear. Let's explore this realm a bit in Jesus' mission, looking specifically at two of the phrases.

Jesus came to "preach good news to the poor." Is Jesus referring figuratively to "the poor in spirit," (Matthew 5:3) or the physically poor? Jesus refers to both. The rich had placed their

security and worth in money, and Jesus' message challenged their values to the core. To the poor, Jesus' message offered security and worth in God. The world didn't view them with much worth, but God did. It gave the poor value and hope – in other words, good news.

Jesus came to "give sight to the blind." As we saw, this has a spiritual meaning, but it also has a physical one as well. Jesus was merciful and physically healed the blind. Let's just read one example:

29 As Jesus and his disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed him.

30 Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

31 The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

32 Jesus stopped and called them. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked.

33 "Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

34 Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him. (Mt 20:2-34)

3. THE WHOLE GOSPEL INCLUDES THE SOCIAL

Micah and Jesus both called this "justice."

A good way to distinguish between mercy (the physical) and justice (the social), is that mercy deals with symptoms and justice deals with systems.

As Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, "We are not

to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself."

This is the part of the gospel that is most frequently missing in our gospel. It is the thing that we forgot in our faith journey. But Jesus' "whole" (W-H-O-L-E) gospel definitely includes the social realm, as well as the physical, and spiritual. (It's true that some churches have practiced the "social gospel" and left behind the "spiritual gospel". They have a hole in their gospel too.) Let's take a look at three of the statements Jesus made from a social perspective.

Jesus came to "give sight to the blind." As we saw this has a spiritual meaning and a physical meaning. But it also has a social consequence. The blind or the handicapped were discriminated against in Jesus' day – as they are in many places today. To give them sight was to stop them from being further discriminated against. It put them back into the mainstream of society.

Jesus came to "release the oppressed." This concept seems to relate particularly to social oppression. Who was oppressed in Jesus' day? The Old Testament often accuses the wealthy of taking advantage of widows and orphans, tricking them out of their property (see Luke 18:1-7). Sometimes people find themselves in a bad place because of personal irresponsibility or an unfortunate event. But sometimes it is because of social reasons. Those social factors that the gospel confronts are things like unequal distribution of power, racism, denial of opportunities, unfair distribution of resources, etc.

Jesus came to "proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." As I said earlier, The Law of Moses required that every 50 years, slaves were to be freed and all debts cleared. Whether someone owed one shekel or one thousand shekels, all was forgiven. Those who had become slaves for economic reasons were freed. This "Jubilee

Year” established social rules that knocked down unfair systems and recreated equal opportunity – a chance to start over on a level playing field.

IMAGINE THE RESULT

Jesus wanted His kingdom to influence and encompass the spiritual, physical, and social realms. He wanted His mission and His kingdom to affect every sector of society.

Jesus’ mission didn’t just influence first-century biblical history. His mission has had a profound effect on world history and modern times.

How has Jesus’ mission affected government, education, literacy, science, music, art, slavery, health, hunger, etc?

In government, Jesus’ message has promoted equality and liberty for all. In education, it has championed school for the masses. In literacy, it created a written language for many of the world’s spoken languages. In science, it developed a world-view that a rational God created a rational universe that could be known. In music and art, many of the greatest composers and artists were Christians expressing God’s glory through their craft. In slavery, although many Christians owned slaves in history, historians credit Christians with being the primary force behind ending the international slave trade.

So much more can be said about Jesus’ impact on history. A whole sermon series could be devoted to it. But Jesus’ greatest influence was in creating a culture of compassion and justice. Jesus emphasized helping the neediest. People like Mother Theresa devoted their lives to emulating Jesus in this way, the Salvation Army, religious hospitals, and church-supported soup kitchens and thrift shops in every community do their work in the name of Jesus.

How do we as Christians deal with the social oppression we see in our system? We can’t just label it “the social gospel” and ignore it. If we are Jesus’ disciples, then we are to join Him in His mission to seek mercy and justice for the poor, the weak, the broken, and oppressed. Each political party has its own formula for lessening oppression of the poor and disenfranchised -- and frankly, both parties’ programs fall far short. Ultimately, helping the oppressed must not be just a political goal; it must also be a personal goal.

ILLUSTRATE THE APPLICATION

And our own spiritual goal is to become transformed people whose actions are a result of faith rather than trying to prove something to God or to the world. As you spend time with God and trust in His love, acts of mercy and justice will begin to naturally flow out of your faith.

Do you ever sense that God has a bigger purpose for your life than the one you are living? Do you feel like something is missing? Do you think God expects more from you as a follower of His Son? That’s because Jesus didn’t just save you from something. He saved you for something. This is the whole gospel.

Jesus’ mission has made the world an incalculably better place. And by joining your life to His mission, you can make this a better world too.

Pastor: Illustrate from your own church how some people or ministries are making a difference physically and socially – e.g. helping the hungry, disabled, foster kids, orphans, AIDS patients, single moms, etc.

Invite people to look into the opportunities the church already has for them to participate in.