

## **THE KEY TO EVERYTHING**

**Luke 4:14–30**

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Our Scripture text continues in the Gospel of Luke. Today we're in Luke 4:14–30. I understand this was the text last Sunday morning as well. Evidently, the Spirit has in mind that we get a double dip of this passage at the beginning of the year.

I call my message today “The Key to Everything.” The reason why I chose that is, as I studied the Scripture this week, I realized that if you and I could live by the six fundamental principles that this passage of Scripture is showing, we could live all the Scripture. And that really this is the key to everything. In fact, I became convinced that the Word of God is such a living thing that, if we take any part of it and utterly give ourselves to obedience to any part, we will be able to obey the whole of Scripture and walk in the whole of Scripture.

As we look at this passage today—the Key to Everything—we see Jesus coming to His own hometown and there are these lessons that are involved.

We read first of all, in verses 13–15: “When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him until an opportune time. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him” (NIV). Note the phrase “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.” This would suggest the first principle that is the key to everything and that is:

### **I. We open our life to the Spirit of God.**

Any kind of cursory reading of the Gospel of Luke will find us hearing Luke say, over and over again, things about the indwelling presence of the Spirit. We look at the Spirit upon Jesus and we see that His presence, in Jesus' life, is the model for His presence in our own. The nature of Jesus

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is by virtue of the work of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon the Virgin Mary. She conceived by the Spirit, Luke 1:35. Not only was His nature due to the Spirit, but His character breathed the Spirit's presence, for in Jesus, there was love and joy and peace and patience and goodness and kindness and gentleness and self-control and faithfulness. Not only that, but because of the Spirit's presence in Jesus, there was the guidance of the Spirit in His life. He was led by the Spirit into the desert. That was the beginning of chapter 4, verse 1. Then after He is done with His testing, again the Spirit is upon Him to lead Him into Galilee. Then the Spirit empowers Him, both at His baptism, where the Spirit comes upon Him, and His ministry, where He does what He does by virtue of the Spirit. And Jesus Himself says, "The Spirit has anointed Me."

I think that the only cure for a ritualistic formalistic religion is to have an ongoing vital experience with God that daily seeks the indwelling of the Spirit. People who come to God coldly, or who simply come to God with an attitude of duty or do not seek to treasure the work of the Holy Spirit in their life, wind up with an orthodox Christianity that does not breathe real life into life. The antidote to that is the work of the Spirit. And to have a view of the Spirit that goes beyond simply saying, "I was born by the Spirit and isn't that enough?" The Early Church never assumed that anyone ever had enough of the Spirit of God. For the Spirit of God is not simply a principle we believe. He is a person; we receive and go on receiving. Because we have a capacity and a need for more of the Spirit's work and He has more of Himself to continually give to us. So, as we face 1985, we can thank the Lord that the Spirit has brought in us—because of His work—a new nature, if we are Christians. We can ask that in this year of '85 we would open our life to the Spirit's character in us, so that we, indeed, can be a person of love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and faithfulness and gentleness and self-control. We can ask the Spirit to lead us in whatever we face, whether it be a desert or whether it be needed

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corrections that should be made in our life. And that the Spirit will empower us, empower us beyond our human resources and ability to serve Him and to serve others. Many of us, when we're confronted with an opportunity to serve Christ, immediately take an attitude that says, "I could never do that." I think that's great—there's some things we could never do. But that shouldn't keep us from doing them. It's exactly for that reason that the Spirit has come—to help us do the things we can't do and to empower us in ways we would never see ourselves functioning unless the Spirit came upon us.

I hope that when, if the Lord tarries, we come to the end of 1985, we could look at our lives individually and we could look at this church collectively and we could say, "The reason why we were able to do what we did this year was because the Spirit of God was upon us. There is no other reason." Open your life to the Spirit of God.

## **II. Maintain a habit of worship**

Verse 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" (NIV). His custom—His tradition—a thing that He did regularly. Jesus didn't regard Himself above the synagogue. That is, He didn't say, "I know the Bible. I caused it to be written. What do I need to hear it for? I could preach it more eloquently than anyone in the synagogue. Why do I need the synagogue? I know all the songs, so why do I need the psaltery to sing along with everyone else." He could have used all those things and sort of gone off by Himself and worshipped. But Luke notes that it was the custom, the tradition of His life, to each Sabbath day make that appointed moment where the people of God were in worship.

There is a staying power in our life too, to maintain a habit of worship and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus in that tradition. There are people who say, "I feel closer to God in nature than

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I feel to Him in church.” Or “I do my praying on the mountains,” or “The lake makes a far better chapel.” Jesus could have said all of these things, because He did worship God in nature. He did pray in the mountains and He did worship Him on the waters of the Lake of Galilee. But He kept His appointment in the synagogue because, collectively, with the people of God, He found His own soul nourished by the worship, by the instruction and by what God was doing in building His people.

This is a far better thing than to say, “I worship the Lord just as well if I find Him on the eighteenth hole.” I heard about the preacher who went golfing on Sunday. He got a hole-in-one on the eighteenth and couldn’t tell anybody about it. Find and maintain a regular place, a regular set time of worship. Maintain the habit of worship.

### **III. Envision life—your life—as a blessing.**

The self-concept of Jesus is seen here in verse 16 and following. “And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written [that is, from Isaiah 61]: ‘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’” (Luke 4:16–19, NIV).

What is really instructive about this particular quotation from Isaiah 61:1-2 is that Jesus ends the quotation in the middle of a sentence. Isaiah went on to say that, in addition to proclaiming the year of God’s favor, this was the year which the Jewish prophets were always castigating the people for not keeping. It was the Year of Jubilee, the fiftieth year, the Sabbath of the Sabbath, when the land was to rest and all the debtors were to go free. Instead of keeping this time, they had not kept it. The prophet Isaiah looked forward to that time of golden Jubilee, when Messiah

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Himself would come. Jesus, in looking at this says, “That day has come.” But Isaiah had not finished the sentence with “to proclaim the year of God’s favor.” He continues the sentence by saying, “...and the day of vengeance of our God.” In other words, Isaiah sees the day of the Messiah as a day of grace and a day of judgment. Jesus cuts the sentence off midstream to emphasize the fact that His first coming was a coming of grace and grace alone. And that the day of vengeance, of judgment, was postponed to that later time. Now was the time of blessing. The poor, the prisoner, the blind, the oppressed can do nothing for themselves, therefore, Jesus has come to bring in God’s Year of jubilee.

I think, when we look at how much the Lord wanted to free people, we can transfer some of that into our own lives, and each of us can look around and find people around us who are poor and imprisoned and blind and oppressed. Part of the Lord’s purpose in our life is we can proclaim with Him a time of grace and reconciliation and health. Rather than a ministry of judgment and criticism and bringing down upon them. The poor are with us in family, people who are unable, seemingly, to pick themselves up by their own bootstraps. The prisoners are among our own friends and kin, people who are chained to habits and attitudes that are devastating in their lives. The blind are people around us, close to us, who are unable to see the possibilities of their own life and others’ lives. Maybe a spouse who is unable, you think, to see your possibilities. And the oppressed are those who are so bent down by the adversities of life, or trapped in the bondage of some addiction, that they seem unable to free themselves. The Lord calls us alongside to be involved in His liberation movement. He says, “I’ve given My life to freeing others and announcing that this is the year of God’s grace and the year of God’s help.” And, by inference, He’s asking us to participate with Him in that ministry.

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The enemy is telling us all the time what we can't do and what isn't possible, and he washes people's mind with that idea as well, saying, "God would never want you because you've done too many things wrong."

The story of the thirteen-year-old boy from Long Beach who had been kidnapped and was missing for two years and was found on the East coast, through an accidental series of circumstances...he was asked if he hadn't thought, a number of times, of calling his parents when he had a free moment. What had happened was that the man who had kidnapped him had so brainwashed him into having him think that his parents would never accept him if he called, that he didn't call them when he had the free moment to do so. He believed the lie of the kidnapper.

There is that strategy in this world too, where the evil one wants people to think that the heavenly Father doesn't want anything to do with them. That God has washed His hands of you and has no plans for your life and no grace and no mercy and no help and no repair for your brokenness. Jesus says, "That's not true. This is the day." This is the age of God's grace and of His favor and He's especially come to help anyone who feels that way in their own life.

#### **IV. A fourth great principle arising out of this Scripture: we must live in the present.**

"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, and he began by saying to them, 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'" (Luke 4:20-21, NIV).

Religious audiences are used to hearing things that don't plug in to their own life right now, about hearing the kingdom of God and the future or about using some theological discussion of the past. Jesus turned all that around, and when He finished quoting the Scripture, said, "Today it's happening right here in your midst." And that caused offense.

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We need to live in our own lives with the perspective that today is the only time that we have.

We cannot do anything about what happened yesterday or about what happened last year, except to change our perception of it. That's why it's so useless to spend much time crying over spilt milk.

I read a story recently about Robert E. Lee. After the Civil War, he came across a lady who was berating him for what his soldiers had done to a favorite tree in her front yard. The gunfire had stripped away most of the branches of the tree. The tree now appeared to be dead, and she was bitterly complaining to Robert E. Lee. He turned to her and very tartly said, "Lady, cut the tree down." And left her with that.

I thought, "There are times in our life when we need to hear a sharp word like that." A continued rehearsal of the years or the woes of yesteryear are not going to do anything for us today or tomorrow. The only thing we can change about yesterday is our perception of it. That's the only thing we can change. May the Lord help us today to do that. There's little we can do about tomorrow except place ourselves in the position today of being in God's will so that, if today we're in God's will, we can be in His will tomorrow. Today is the only time we have.

Bruce Larson tells—about living on a little island in Florida for six years where there was little tavern called Scott's Pub—that there was a sign on that tavern that said, "Free beer tomorrow."

Everyday, he said, for six years, that sign was there. Free beer tomorrow.

When we defer hope, it doesn't come. When we defer service, when we say, "Someday I will get around to it," we're effectively making a decision not to do it. Today is the day. The Lord asked decisive obedience not tomorrow, but today.

**V. Avoid the Nazareth mentality.**

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“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. ‘Isn't this Joseph's son?’ they asked. Jesus said to them, ‘Surely you will quote this proverb to me:

“Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.” I tell you the truth,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian’” (Luke 4:22-27, NIV).

You see the Nazareth mentality coming in here. When He begins pressing on the fact that He is today fulfilling the Scripture, they begin raising the question, “Isn't this Joseph's son?” We know that that isn't right. He was not Joseph's son. He was Mary's Son by the Holy Spirit. But if you've ever lived in a small town, you know how long it takes gossip to die down. It never dies down. And the gossip in Nazareth had always been, “Mary says she had a virgin birth. But whoever knew of a virgin who gave birth? He is Joseph's son.”

So, when they wanted to dismiss what He was saying, they found it easy to use that old epithet that probably Jesus, as a child, had had thrown at Him time and time again. That He was an illegitimate kid. In a religious community, that was a real strike against a child. From that, they moved to downright opposition against Him.

The problem with Nazareth is that they grew up with having a set idea about Jesus. When Jesus presented to them new evidences about who He was, they were not willing to change and open their mind to accept the new evidences. They had a closed idea of Jesus.

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One of the real burdens that I have as an individual Christian is for people who grew up in the church and maybe grew up in a legalistic church or ritualistic church, and then went away from the Lord. And today they're away from the Lord. And the reason why they're still rejecting the Lord is "I grew up in that. If that's Christianity, I don't want it." Sometimes that person has a closed mentality of Jesus. They've got a caricature of Jesus from when they were young. All their life, they have lived with that caricature, which was never the real thing anyway. The only way to avoid the Nazareth mentality is to take the new evidences that Jesus is presenting you about who He is, and open your life to the new evidences and throw away the caricature and the idea that you had of Him from the past that is woefully inadequate and untrue. Nazareth had a shut mentality.

When we were in Israel just a few days ago, I said to the guide, "I'd like to spend less time at Megiddo and more time at Nazareth." At Megiddo, there's this marvelous archeological dig, the best dig you can go through in the Holy Land. And from Megiddo, you can look out on the Valley of Armageddon and see across to the distant Mount Tabor and Nazareth, and this is a panoramic view par excellence. She looked at me in horror, "Why would you want to spend more time at Nazareth?" I said, "Because it's Jesus' hometown and I've never really walked the streets. I want to walk the streets of Nazareth more than just visit the well of Mary." She said, "Please don't spend any more time in Nazareth. It's still a no good town. It's still the way it was then. There's nothing in Nazareth." I looked more closely, as we drove through, and sure enough, I guess she was right; although the people might not agree. But Nazareth today has a communist mayor. I think it's the only large city in Israel that has a communist mayor. It has about thirty to forty thousand people. Still not respected in His hometown.

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*Lord, help me to avoid a hardening of the categories, saying, “My mind’s made up and nothing’s going to change me. I’ve already arrived at my opinion.” Lord, keep me supple and facile in my thoughts, to be open to what new things You’re trying to put into my life.*

### **VI. Walk away from anger.**

“All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way” (Luke 4:28–30, NIV).

Jesus compares Nazareth unfavorably with a Gentile widow and with a Syrian General. This did not take well. So the citizens rushed Him out of the synagogue to the brow of a hill, which you can see today. On the southwest corner of Nazareth, this brow overlooks the valley of Armageddon, looking toward the west—a very steep drop, to fall off that precipice would certainly bring death. But Jesus escaped. There’s all kinds of theories about how He escaped. Some say, “He just turned on supernatural power and walked through the group. Others say, “No, it wasn’t that He used supernatural power here. It was just that He was so ordinary looking that He indistinguishably melted into the crowd and people forgot who He was.” Another group says, “The crowd was so mad. When you get angry you get confused and so, while everybody was all in a hubbub, Jesus simply slipped out.”

I don’t know what the right theory is, but I do know that Jesus himself did not become angry, that He kept His cool when everyone else was losing theirs and that He walked away from anger. And further, He resumed His ministry and did not let the Nazareth anger become a block to His own productivity. He didn’t get stuck on the fact that Nazareth was mad at Him. He didn’t get stuck on the fact that He had a right to be legitimately disappointed in what His hometown

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thought of Him and say, “If you can’t even succeed in your hometown, how can you succeed anywhere else?” Sometimes, we can get stuck on somebody else’s anger. We say, if I can’t make it with them, can I make it anywhere? The beautiful thing about Jesus is that He walks away from those who tried to put this negative bur in His life. He simply walks away. And He goes on to assume productivity in His own life. He did not retreat. He did not withdraw into reclusive grief. He did not spit back in anger. He simply handled it by walking away from it.

I think these six principles are a key to everything. A pastor friend was telling me about when the new church building of their church was built, that the board of elders gave him an eighteen-karat gold key to open the door. But the problem with an eighteen karat gold key was that the gold was too soft and it wouldn’t unlock the door. Sometimes we have that view of Scripture: it’s so high and lofty it won’t really work and unlock our situations in life. God has given us a golden key, but it’s got iron in it. You’ll find that these keys work in your life.

They are the keys of everyday and all through ’85, opening our life to God’s Spirit, maintaining the habit of worship, envisioning our life as a blessing, living in the present, avoiding the Nazareth mentality, and walking away from anger. Keep this part of Scripture, and God will give us the power to keep it as a whole.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, we thank You again for Your Word which comes as a liberation to our life. We’re glad that the message of Jesus has reached us today in our need. We pray, Lord, that as we come into this time, now, of communion and treasuring Your presence through the elements, that our lives will be open to You and that we let Your Word speak to us, and recognize the need of our life to open ourselves to Your Spirit, Lord. We’re candidates for the filling of Your Spirit in our life. In new and richer and more powerful ways, make us men and women of the Spirit of God.

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Make us men and women of discipline and habit. Make us Your people. We ask these things in

Your name. Amen.