



Fourth Sunday of Epiphany
Light of Christ Anglican Church
The Rev. Mike Moffitt
January 30, 2022

God's Word Always Brings Positive and Negative Reactions

Text: [Luke 4:21-32](#)

On December 8, 2021, the Canadian House of Commons passed Bill C-4-
“An Act to amend the “Criminal Code” considering conversion therapy.¹
I’m quoting from the official website of the Canadian Parliament’s
summary of what this bill was specifically dealing with.

SUMMARY

“This enactment amends the Criminal Code to, among other things, create the following offences:

- (a) causing another person to undergo conversion therapy.
- (b) doing anything for the purpose of removing a child from Canada with the intention that the child undergo conversion therapy outside Canada.
- (c) promoting or advertising conversion therapy; and
- (d) receiving a financial or other material benefit from the provision of conversion therapy.”

It also amends the Criminal Code to authorize courts to order those advertisements for conversion therapy be disposed of or deleted.

¹ Government Bill (House of Commons) C-4 (44-1) - Royal Assent - An Act to amend the Criminal Code (conversion therapy) - Parliament of Canada

Preamble

“Whereas conversion therapy causes harm to the persons who are subjected to it;

Whereas conversion therapy causes harm to society because, among other things, it is based on and propagates myths and stereotypes about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, including the myth that heterosexuality, cisgender gender identity, and gender expression that conforms to the sex assigned to a person at birth are to be preferred over other sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions;

And whereas, in light of those harms, it is important to discourage and denounce the provision of conversion therapy in order to protect the human dignity and equality of all Canadians;

Now, therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:”

It goes on to describe in detail what this new criminal code covers. I won't take the time to describe that, but I will read you the response in a letter published by Liberty Coalition Canada, a group of Evangelical pastors:

This bill's wording is sufficiently broad to allow for the criminal prosecution of Christians who would speak biblical truth into the lives of those in bondage to sexual sins like homosexuality and transgenderism... Even a mother or father who offers their children freedom from sexual sin through repentance and faith

in the gospel of Jesus Christ ([1 Corinthians 6:9–11](#)) could be threatened with five years in jail.

The letter continues with a rebuke of Members of Parliament, who unanimously rushed Bill C-4 through the House of Commons last month without any debate or public input:

Our King and Head is greatly displeased with our MPs for their sinful disregard for the spiritual and eternal well-being of Canadians. But it is important to note that they have also committed high blasphemy by referring to biblical teaching as ‘myths’ in this legislation. We all must therefore tremble to consider what terrifying judgments will be visited upon our nation for this bold gesture of hatred towards the most high God.²

Many of you have probably been reading about what is happening in Finland. In Finland a Pastor and a member of Parliament are being put on trial for their faith.

This is huge news for all Christians around the world as this surely will not stay in Finland but will spread across the globe if we do not stand firm in our faith and raise Christ up to a raging world.

Perhaps what is even more concerning is what the charges are concerned with. I am quoting from an article from the “Freedom First Network.”

Their alleged crimes in a country that claims to guarantee freedom of speech and religion include tweeting a picture of a Bible verse. Potential penalties if they are convicted include fines and up to two years in prison.

² January 16 is Biblical Sexuality Sermon Sunday (campaignlifecoalition.com)

They are being charged with “hate speech” for respectively writing and publishing a 24-page 2004 booklet that explains basic Christian theology about sex and marriage, which reserves sex exclusively for within marriage, which can only consist of one man and one woman, for life. The Finnish prosecutor claims centuries-old Christian teachings about sex “incite hatred” and violate legal preferences for government-privileged identity groups.³

I wanted to begin with these two examples of what is going on with our neighbors in the North (Canada) and in Finland, even though I could spend more time this morning with other equally egregious examples from around the world. *Christianity Today* in the January 13, 2021 edition wrote an article entitled, “The 50 Countries Where It’s Most Dangerous to Follow Jesus in 2021.” The truth is that we should not be surprised or shocked by the recent events that I mentioned. We should remember that in all of history those who choose to follow the Lord Jesus Christ always came under attack by those who follow the prince of darkness, usually unknowingly.

In our Old Testament reading from [Jeremiah 1:4–10](#) we see the young Jeremiah assuring God that he was not the right man to be a prophet, “*Ah, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I’m only a youth.*” He was likely in his late teens or early 20’s but was old enough to realize that earlier prophets in Judah and Israel were not received that well, but usually were killed. He probably suspected that he would not be the exception to the rule. However, it was clear that God would not let him refuse the calling upon his life. Listen again to verses 7–9;

³ Finland Puts Christianity On Trial As The Bible Gets Called Hate Speech – Freedom First Network

But the Lord said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a youth'; for to all to whom I send you, you shall go, and whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, declares the Lord." Then the Lord put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said to me, "Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

Talk about not feeling qualified. In truth Jeremiah suffered all kinds of abuse and was not only ignored but also mistreated by those to whom he brought God's message—persecuted by those he was trying to guide and save.

I love the honest relationship that he had with God. He was obedient but sometimes he just had enough. Listen to his complaint to God in Jeremiah 20:7–10;

*O Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived;
you are stronger than I, and you have prevailed.
I have become a laughingstock all the day; everyone mocks me.
For whenever I speak, I cry out, I shout, "Violence and destruction!"
For the word of the Lord has become for me a reproach and derision
all day long.
If I say, "I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,"
there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones,
and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot.
For I hear many whisperings. Terror is on every side!
"Denounce him! Let us denounce him!" say all my close
friends, watching for my fall.*

“Perhaps he will be deceived; then we can overcome him and take our revenge on him.”

The title “the weeping prophet” is frequently ascribed to Jeremiah, but his tears are not merely born out of frustration but oddly enough are primarily a revelation of his love for his people. Some have suggested it was evidence of inner weakness and loneliness, but I think it ran much deeper and was a result of grieving for the spiritual state of God’s chosen people. Even though Jeremiah often complained about his life as God’s prophet or condemned his adversaries, we shouldn’t place much emphasis on them. He did as the Lord commanded him, even when he really didn’t want to.

The later comparison made between him and Jesus in [Matthew 16:14](#) shows us that his reputation must have included the attribute of courage as well as tenderness. He remained what the Lord made of him in Jeremiah 1:18, *“a fortified city, an iron pillar and a bronze wall to stand against the whole land—against the kings of Judah, its officials, its priests and the people of the land”*.

F.B. Huey in his commentary of Jeremiah suggests,

Evaluated by most standards of success, Jeremiah was an abysmal failure. Judged by God’s standards, however, he stood and stands tall. He remained faithful. The great rulers of Jeremiah’s day – Ashurbanipal, Nebuchadnezzar, Neco, and Hophra – have largely been forgotten. Their influence is nil. Whereas Jeremiah’s name and influence remain because of his obedience to God’s will for him.⁴

⁴ Huey, F. B. Jeremiah, Lamentations. Vol. 16. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993. P.24

Let's turn now to our Gospel reading from [Luke 4:21-32](#). Last week we considered Jesus returning to His hometown of Nazareth, and His teaching in the synagogue there.

As a reminder listen to Luke 4:17-21,

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."

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. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

That is where we will begin this morning. As I pointed out last week, Jesus' claim that *"today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing"* was a very bold statement that places both listeners and readers in the position of having to make a choice.

I mentioned last week that for those looking to God for hope, Jesus was the answer. To respond to God, one must be open to him. For those in need of God, Jesus has a message of good news. Luke loves to emphasize that a potential audience for this message can be found among the poor. His social concern expresses itself fully through the details of what Jesus said at the synagogue—details the other Gospels lack. But this social concern is concerned with spiritual realities, not political ideologies.

Jesus was claiming to be the fulfillment of [Isaiah 61:1-2](#) where God would come to His people and bring them out of exile into a time of tremendous

blessings. If He was telling the truth then this was indeed good news because they were promised to have God's favor once again as His chosen people. Had they learned the lessons of what happened when they turned away from God's laws to worship other gods, that were made of wood, metal, or stone? In other words they were not gods all. Would they see that they couldn't have one foot in a life where Jesus is Lord over all things while the other foot is firmly planted in the things of the world? It would be imperative that they understood, and it is for us today as well, that Jesus' teaching is not some ethical instruction detached from who He is. He is the one promised of God. Either he brings God's promises, or he doesn't. They would be forced to make the decision to follow Him or reject Him. That's true for us today too.

The crowd was probably taken back at the boldness of the claim; they were amazed and perplexed simultaneously. *"They spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth."* They recognized the man who had grown up in their midst, but this claim didn't seem to fit the one they knew.

So Luke writes of the question that was on everyone's mind, *"Isn't this Joseph's son? How could he be the promised one of God?"* Part of the revelation of Jesus' identity is that He knew their thoughts, so He responds to that. I wonder if that occurred to them. You'll notice that in the Gospels, when someone thinks and then Jesus responds, His words usually carry a rebuke (7:39, 49-50; 11:38-39).

Jesus replies in three ways. First, he cites a proverb that indicates that He knows that they want him to prove His claims by showing some miracle revealing His power and authority. They had probably heard about the miraculous things He had done in other places. Throughout the Scriptures when God moves in power or in a supernatural way there will usually still

be doubt. Miracles, as powerful a testimony as they are to the claims of Jesus, in the end are not persuasive to those who do not want to come to God. Later in Luke's gospel Jesus will point out in 16:31, *"If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."*

Those listening must be willing to hear the Word of God and receive it before they will see anything as God's work but will look for other explanations instead.

Second, Jesus quotes a celebrated adage, common among the Jews, that a prophet is not honored in his home town. However, that would also be true for the majority throughout Israel, the very people that claimed to be the children of God were blinded to the identity of their creator. This had always proven to be true as we saw earlier in Jeremiah, and Jesus knew that it would certainly be true of Him. This theme will surface continually in Luke and in the Book of Acts, also written by Luke. A perfect example is the words of Stephen in Acts 7:51–53.

"You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

Immediately after Stephen said this to the High Priest and those within the Sanhedrin, they proved the truth of his charges by stoning him to death. God's message is often met with rejection. So Jesus' use of this proverb would also serve as a prediction that for many in Israel Jesus' ministry would follow this pattern.

Third, in Luke 4:25–27 Jesus recalls the history of Israel in the period of Elijah and Elisha ([1 Kings 17–18](#); [2 Kings 5:1–14](#)). The history lesson is a warning, but also a story that they would have been very familiar with. That period was a low point in the nation's life when rejection of God was at an all-time high and idolatry and unfaithfulness were far more common than faithfulness and belief.

So God moved his works of mercy outside the nation into Gentile regions, as only a widow in Sidon and Naaman the commander of the Syrian Army experienced God's healing. The price of rejecting God's message is severe, so His mercy moved on to other nations.

It is foolish and dangerous to walk away from God's offer of deliverance, especially when you have entered into covenant with Him. Israel had been chosen by God to bring the revelation of Jehovah the Creator God of both the heavens and the earth to all the nations. When they turned away from this command, God revealed Himself by other means.

So in light of that, this exchange with those in His hometown reveals the challenge of Jesus' ministry but also carries with it the certain promise of tremendous blessing when received and the certain promise of eternal judgment if rejected.

It is really crucial to note that there has never been anyone in all of human history that had something to offer God that He needed. We are desperate for Him, so in His mercy He came to man in a way that he could relate to and yet men rejected the offer of an eternal relationship with the Lord of Glory.

Once again the crowd does not seize the opportunity to embrace with joy the coming of the Messiah, but instead responds with anger at Jesus' rebuke. The suggestion that Gentiles might be blessed while Israel reaps

nothing leaves them fuming. Just like their forefathers they wanted a king on their own terms who would restore Israel to prominence. The suggestion that Israel was accountable for their constant rejection of God and His messengers just wouldn't do.

The truth is that not much has changed over the past 2,000 years. People want God to pour out His blessings without submitting themselves to His holy Word in obedience. Often when tragedy strikes people complain that it proves that God is either not loving or likely doesn't exist. This is coupled with the frustration that they expect blessings while steadfastly ignoring God's word and commands.

The crowd's reaction was rage. Listen again to Luke 4:29–30,

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.

So Jesus departs, despite the crowd's efforts to seize him and remove him from the scene. I would love to know how Jesus just passed through their midst. There is something about Jesus as Lord that people can try to turn their back on and do away with him, but he will always be in their midst whether they realize it or not.

Darrell Bock in his IVP Commentary on the Gospel of Luke writes,

Opportunities for God's work are also opportunities for tragedy. That is what is pictured in Jesus' synagogue visit. The promise's arrival was a great, historic moment, an occasion to enter into God's rich blessing. But blessing refused is tragic. The crowd's response is the first of many moments of opportunity lost in the Gospel. It is another step in a paradise

lost. The gospel brings a choice—and choice has consequences.⁵

So in the last section of today's gospel Jesus leaves behind those in Nazareth who resented his claims and rebuke but in rage wanted to kill Him, so he goes down to Capernaum. Let's read Luke 4:31–32,

And he went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

In contrast to the Pharisees and teachers of the law who appealed to tradition and previous teachers, Jesus did not cite authorities, but spoke with His own authority. This difference from the way men usually taught in the synagogue amazed the people because they recognized that Jesus revealed a depth of understanding that moved their hearts. He spoke as one who knew their longing for God, and it was very compelling. It still is.

This lesson from Luke's gospel should give us an understanding of the insanity going on in this country, Canada, Finland and around the world. Jesus is offering relationship with those who will receive Him for who He is—the Lord of Glory. This requires that we bow before Him in repentance of sin and embrace Him as Lord. Then we follow Him according to His word in a new life with God.

At the same time the lord of darkness is continually offering a counterfeit gospel that offers fleshly pleasures and promises all the blessings of the world to those who will just reach out and take it. He has been telling that lie since the Garden of Eden and it always has led to disappointment, misery, and spiritual death, and it never even delivers on what was

⁵ Jesus Preaches in Nazareth: The Time of Fulfillment Has Come (4:16-30) - IVP New Testament Commentary Series - Bible Gateway

promised. The real tragedy is that it also leads to eternal judgment for those who reject the offer of the cross and instead choose another path. There are only two options. Choose Jesus.

Let's pray.

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