



11: “GRANNY THROWS” AT THE FOUL SHOT LINE (Luke 4:14-30)

I was recently listening to the wonderful book “Keep Christianity Weird”¹, where the author Mike Frost talked about Wilt Chamberlain’s terrible foul shooting record. Did you know that, in spite of being one of the best basketball players of all time, Wilt Chamberlain totally sucked at foul shots? It was this way so much so that other players playing against him knew it was better to foul him so he would miss free throw shots than to allow him to get into the paint.

But there was one point where Wilt got better at foul shooting in his NBA career...

This happened because Wilt Chamberlain flirted with the “underhanded style”. The method, also called “granny style” shooting, was favored by Rick Barry, a career 89.3% free throw shooter, and it helped Chamberlain shoot a career-best 61% from the line in 1961–62, the same season he sank 28 of 32 free throws in his record-setting 100-point game. However, Chamberlain reverted to traditional foul shooting, his percentages predictably plunged again, and he later admitted that he felt “like a sissy” when he shot underhanded.²

¹ <https://mikefrost.net/books/keep-christianity-weird-embracing-the-discipline-of-being-different/>

² <https://www.si.com/nba/2016/06/30/malcolm-gladwell-wilt-chamberlain-rick-barry-nba-free-throw-granny-shot>

How many of us decide not to do the right thing because we “feel like sissies”, and wonder how people will react to us? I respect Rick Barry because he didn’t give a rats behind about the way he looked, he did what was right! He did what worked, even if it made him look like a weirdo!

And Jesus always did what was right, even when it made Him look like a weirdo.

If we really follow Jesus there will be times when He calls us to do what is right and look like weirdos too!

As we jump into Luke 4:14, we know that Jesus has been baptized by John the Baptist, “coronating” His ministry. We know that Jesus has been in the wilderness fasting for forty days, being tempted by the devil three times and shutting his lil punk butt down.

14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity. 15 He was teaching in their synagogues, being praised by everyone. (Luke 4:14-15)

Jesus is the Messiah, and all of heaven and earth have been preparing Him for the moment He’s in. He’s been coronated and tested, and the power of the Spirit fills Him up to officially begin His ministry.

Now back before I started physically devolving into my early forties, I used to love lifting weights. I loved going at it hard- having five rotations of muscle groups, doing like eight to ten sets a day on each muscle group then moving to the next. One day I’d work chest only, do some abs, and some cardio, next day I’d do biceps only and cardio, next day I’d do back, abs and cardio, next day I’d do triceps and cardio, and then do shoulders, abs and legs, then resting for a few days on weekends. I loved the burn it gave me.

Now at the age of forty two, I can’t lift crazy any more because I’ll pull muscles, so I do much smaller weights with more reps, and I’m gradually working it back into my weekly routines.

Resistance training (also called strength training or weight training) is the use of resistance to muscular contraction to build strength, anaerobic endurance and size of skeletal muscles. Resistance training is based on the principle that muscles of the body will work to overcome a resistance force when they are required to do so. When you do resistance training repeatedly and consistently, your muscles become stronger.³

³ <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyiving/resistance-training-health-benefits>

Jesus had just been through **major** spiritual resistance training in the wilderness taking on the devil, and He's filled up with the Spirit's power to do the will of God!

And it gets people's attention!

And we gotta know that whenever we go through trials, and righteously endure them in the power of Christ, the Lord is gonna build His spiritual muscle in us, and people will notice the changes! The apostle Peter, writing to a severely persecuted Church, summed it up strong when he wrote;

12 Dear friends, don't be surprised when the fiery ordeal comes among you to test you, as if something unusual were happening to you. 13 Instead, rejoice as you share in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may also rejoice with great joy when his glory is revealed. 14 If you are ridiculed for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you. 15 Let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or a meddler. 16 But if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed but let him glorify God in having that name. 17 For the time has come for judgment to begin with God's household, and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who disobey the gospel of God? 18 And if a righteous person is saved with difficulty, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? 19 So then, let those who suffer according to God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator while doing what is good. (1 Peter 4:12-19)

The power of God flowing through Jesus's life on earth was wildly evident, and what caught people's interest was His teaching, so much so that they "praised" him. This word (doxazo) was normally reserved for praise to God.⁴

That's right- we can worship Jesus as equally as we can worship God. It's right to do so because Jesus is equal with God.

Then, Jesus makes His way to His hometown...

16 (Jesus) came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. As usual, he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath day and stood up to read. (Luke 4:16)

Luke identified that Jesus's usual activity was to assemble with the people of God during their time of worship. Whereas Jesus's public ministry had just begun, his

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spiritual practice of engaging with God, God's Word, and God's people had always been a regular part of his life.⁵

Part of following Jesus is to worship with God's people as a regular part of life. Our culture will continue to move away from seeing the Church having any value for anyone. We, in our own strength and by our own leading, naturally justify why we don't need the Church or God's people. On the other hand, Christ in us will certainly inspire us to stay deeply connected to the people of God!

But man, this temple gathering Jesus was a part of was about to get weird!

*17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to (Jesus), and unrolling the scroll, He found the place where it was 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 release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. 20 He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. 21 He began by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled."** (Luke 4:17-21)*

According to his custom, Jesus was in the synagogue on the Sabbath, a presence that reflected His respect for the worship of God.

To appreciate what happened here, we need to understand the synagogue service order. Our knowledge of such a service comes from ancient Jewish sources such as the Mishnah, the Jewish codification of their oral law. To have a service;

1. Ten men had to be present.
2. The congregation recited the Shema, the confession recorded in Deuteronomy 6:4 - 9.
3. Then they shared in prayer — some of them set prayers, such as the Tephillah (also called the Shemoneh Esreh and the Eighteen Benedictions).
4. Then came a reading from God's Law, the Torah, followed by a reading of the Prophets. These texts were read in Hebrew and translated into Aramaic, the dominant language of the region.
5. Then followed an exposition that usually tied the readings together,
6. And finally the service closed with a benediction.

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Presumably Jesus spoke during the exposition section of this service. This may explain a peculiarity in his citation, for he not only cited Isaiah 61:1 - 2, but mixed into it an allusion to Isaiah 58:6. The mixture may have represented a summary of a larger reading or set of remarks.⁶

But the big point was that Jesus had come to preach good news to the poor, set captives free, open blind eyes, and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (4:18-19). "The year of the Lord's favor" was another name for the Year of Jubilee (every fifty years; see Lev 25:8-12) when Israel was instructed to set slaves free and release people from their debts, as well as allowing them to return to their family property. Jubilee was a symbol of the social and economic liberation of God's people. The key, however, to understanding the Year of Jubilee was that it was inaugurated by the Day of Atonement, when the issue of sin was addressed. Thus spiritual transformation was the foundation for the legitimate social, political, and economic restructuring of society.⁷

Jesus's preaching, then, addressed both the content of the gospel (Jesus's coming death, burial, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins) and the scope of the gospel (the impact this good news should make on issues of biblical justice—the equitable and impartial application of God's moral law in society). The gospel of the kingdom that Jesus preached saves us from hell, but it should also save us for making a kingdom impact on this world through our "good works" that bring glory to God and benefit to people (see Matt 5:16). Jesus, then, was offering his people then, and offers us now, a new Jubilee.⁸

The Cleveland Browns and the Pittsburgh Steelers have had a long pro football rivalry. Now imagine if I decided to put together a party, and I intentionally got fifty of the craziest, rabid dog pound Browns fans, then got fifty of the wildest Steelers fans I could find, gave them a bunch of beer and sausages, and then crammed them into a room together to watch a game. They might kill each other.

We think of the spiritual and social aspects of the gospel as being as compatible as the Browns and Steelers. But really, they're buddies. One can't exist without the other!

So if you're coming from a place of wanting social justice, caring about genuine racial equality, poverty, women's rights, fair treatment of LGBTQ people, and help for all the marginalized people of the entire planet, then you are right at home with Jesus.

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But just because you're into all these things doesn't mean you get to ignore the fact that Jesus Christ came to save people's lives for eternity, to destroy hell, sin, and death, and to liberate people's souls, calling them into a beautifully rigorous pattern of sanctification and holiness!

So if you're coming from a place of wanting people to be righteous, holy, moral, ethical, and to repent of all their sins, you're also right at home with Jesus.

But just because you're into all these things doesn't mean you get to ignore the fact that Jesus came to liberate people financially, socially, and politically as well as spiritually! Jesus calls all His disciples to radically love their neighbors as themselves!

In fact, it is clear that from the beginning to end Jesus was oriented to the needs of the poor, both those who were poor within themselves and those who were poor in social, economic and political contexts. His parents were not wealthy (2:24) and lived in a despised village (John 1:46). In his public ministry he lived poorly, mixed with the ordinary folk who were the poor, the 'prisoners', the 'blind' and the 'oppressed' (4:18). Furthermore, he shocked the elite by eating with social outcasts (5:30; 19:7). He acted and spoke in a manner that caused him to be seen as a serious threat by the various establishment groups in his country and by the Roman Empire. Truth be told, eventually, the religious establishment and the Roman colonial power murdered Jesus.⁹

But with all that in mind, the message of freedom in this passage was so distinct that it has become a central text for a theological movement known as "liberation theology." This theology teaches that Jesus sides with the poor. In its more radical forms it advocates the use of any and all means of disruption to help those in power yield their oppressive grip on social structures so that the poor are no longer trapped in their social status. It sees a strong political message and overtones Jesus' message.¹⁰

Now it cannot be denied that "poor" here refers to those who live in a socially and economically limited environment. But according to the use of this term in the Old Testament and in Luke, that is not all that is intended here. The Old Testament background points to the *anawim*, the "pious poor," the afflicted (2 Sam. 22:28; Pss. 14:6; 22:24; 25:16; 34:6; 40:17; 69:29; Amos 8:4; Isa. 3:14 - 15). These are the humble whom God will exalt (Luke 1:51 - 53) and who like the prophets suffer for being open to God (6:20 - 23; 1 Cor. 1:26 - 29; James 2:5). They are open to God and his way since

⁹Africa Bible Commentary, Tokunboh Adeyemo, General Editor. Copyright © 2006, 2010, and 2022 by ABC Editorial Board.

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they are frequently the first to recognize how much they need God. To such spiritually open folks, Jesus proclaims release, recovery of sight, and freedom from oppression.¹¹

Browns and Steelers fans gotta stop fighting with each other and realize that they love football!

Social gospel advocates and fundamentalists gotta stop fighting with each other and realize that they both love Jesus! Maybe if both learned from one another we'd have a Church with a very robust vertical **and** horizontal gospel! Now imagine that y'all! People who live wildly radical, hospitable, generous, compassionate, merciful, subversive lives, and right along with that proclaim that Jesus only can save, rescue and snatch people from sin, hell, the devil and death forever! That would look like any other vibrant, unstoppable Christian movement of Christ's disciples that has ever existed in the past 2,000 years! Let's stop fighting with each other and start being weird for Christ together!

So Jesus says all this intense stuff from Isaiah, and then, wildly, rolls up the scroll, gives it back to the attendant, and sits down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue are fixed on him. He begins by saying to them, "Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled." (Luke 4:20-21)

Jesus has all the authority from heaven and earth to declare that He Himself is totally the fulfillment of, and will fulfill, all the promises of scripture! It's mind blowing! And people are in awe of Him at this moment, but then doubts and cynicism start to creep into their consciences...

22 They were all speaking well of him and were amazed by the gracious words that came from his mouth; yet they said, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" 23 Then he said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to me: 'Doctor, heal yourself. What we've heard that took place in Capernaum, do here in your hometown also.'" 24 He also said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 But I say to you, there were certainly many widows in Israel in Elijah's days, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months while a great famine came over all the land. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them except a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. 27 And in the prophet Elisha's time, there were many in Israel who had leprosy, and yet not one of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." (Luke 4:22-27)

The people recognized that Jesus was legit, but then they started to analyze the situation, saying, "this dude making these crazy claims is just Joseph's kid!"

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I'm telling you. I've watched Jesus do some crazy amazing things. I've seen Him deliver people out of major hardcore narcotic drug addiction, I've seen Him drive demons out of people, I've seen Him physically heal people, I've seen Him flip lives around that were heading towards the gutter.

And even amidst all those supernatural things, my natural tendency has always been to say, "But wait a minute now... This didn't really just happen... There must be some sort of scientific, rational explanation that makes sense."

Come on man I gotta be real! Every time that Jesus proves Himself to be who He says He is, initially I'm in awe, and totally amazed, and then I get into skeptic mode and start analyzing...

But as I get older my faith gets a little simpler and I just **TRUST** that the King and Lord of the Universe does things that **BLOW MY WORLD APART!**

33 Oh, the depth of the riches and the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and untraceable his ways! 34 For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? 35 And who has ever given to God, that he should be repaid? 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Don't ever lose your wonder, beloved! God is a God of the impossible! His ways are not our ways!

Jesus, in response to this over-analyzing skepticism, probably from many people He knew during His upbringing, cited a proverb expressing a request that one should do his work in his own backyard to prove his claims. The call for the physician to heal himself was a demand that Jesus do the works he had done elsewhere and show Himself approved. The townsfolk wanted Him to show his stuff. There was another possible implication in their choice of this proverb. It may have suggested that though Jesus presented himself as One who can heal, they ironically believed he was sick in some sense. Something was not quite right with his claim of fulfillment. Something about Jesus needed treatment, unless He could prove otherwise.¹²

And man, to think to ourselves that the wonderful, miraculous, other-worldly things of God are jacked up is a jacked up thing to think! Read that again and let it sink in. **To think to ourselves that the wonderful, miraculous, other-worldly things of God are jacked up is a jacked up thing to think!**

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Have you ever gone above and beyond to do something for somebody and they're unimpressed by what you did?

One time I was at this arts fair thing, and saw this real nice, hip looking wooden engraved sign. It had the outline of the state of Ohio on it and said "I Love Ohio", but it didn't say the word "love" it just had a big ol heart instead. I thought to myself, "man, I'm buying this. My wife is gonna love it!"

I brought it home and showed it to her, all excited. She looked at it and made a face like she had just gotten a whiff of a Long John Silver's trash can. I was all disappointed like, "Sarah, don't you see how great this sign is?"

These people are literally in the presence of the Son of God and they're dogging on Him. Don't they see how wonderful He is? Don't they see how amazing He is? Don't they see how true He is? Like dang man- my wife should've loved that sign I bought her in the same way, right? 😊

Jesus noted how a prophet was without honor in their own land. Jesus knew that many of Israel's prophets in the Old Testament were not well received — a theme Luke noted elsewhere (11:49 - 52; 13:32 - 35; 20:10 - 12; Acts 7:51 - 53). The point? God's message often meets with rejection.¹³

Let me tell you man. If you wanna be a surefire weirdo, start throwing the granny shots of God's truth in front of the people around you. Watch what happens. Jesus was and is the ultimate weirdo. Him living in us will make us weirdos as well.

But we gotta, like Jesus was in **Himself**, be **comfortable** with His weirdness in **us!** Because the thing that's really weird is the fact that we think His ways are weird! After all, they are the ways of heaven, aren't they? If you follow Christ's leading, expect people to misunderstand you, reject you, hurt you, malign you, look down on you, condemn you, backbite about you, and treat you like trash. But here's the catch, when this stuff happens to you, you gotta love in return. Christ will lead you to love in return.

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Detest evil; cling to what is good. 10 Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. 11 Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. 13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with

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those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay, says the Lord. 20 But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head. 21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good. (Romans 12:9-21)

Too many people are uncomfortable with the weirdness of Christ! Don't be one of em!

Let us join with Paul in saying;

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, first to the Jew, and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, just as it is written: The righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:16-17)

Back in His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus knew that performing a miracle to prove He was the Messiah would not help those inclined to unbelief. After all, Elijah and Elisha were rejected by Israelites in spite of the miracles they performed. As a result, Gentiles received God's benefits instead, because they were willing to act in faith at the word of God given them through the prophets. Elijah provided for the widow at Zarephath, and Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian (see 1 Kgs 17:8-16; 2 Kgs 5:1-19).¹⁴

Additionally, and this is significant, the period of Elijah and Elisha was one of the lowest, most apostate periods of the nation's history (1 Kings 17 - 18; 2 Kings 5:1 - 14). Jesus reminded the people that during that time, the prophets did no work in the nation but they did heal a couple of Gentiles! This remark was strong for two reasons: (a) It compared the current era to one of the least spiritual periods in Israel's history, and (b) it suggested that Gentiles, who were intensely disliked among the Jews, were more worthy of ministry than they were.¹⁵

Go ahead and walk into a large gathering of nominal, hypocritical Christians who don't take discipleship seriously but treat their faith like a bunch of legalistic rules, and tell them "Hey, guess what, God is not going to move amongst you at all. But, much like

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back in Elijah and Elisha's day, He is going to really move in the lives of a few, non believing liberals! And He's going to do it right in your face!" See how that goes!

If we were to apply what Jesus was saying to today it may look similar to that. Jesus was essentially telling these devout religious people that God was tired of them, and wasn't going to show Himself, but that He definitely would amongst those they thought of as the "unclean" of their era. What Jesus was saying was super offensive to these people. It was true and would definitely come to pass as His ministry unfolded, but man He was hitting them between the eyes with some hard truth!

And don't be surprised when God moves powerfully in the life of someone who doesn't seem like a likely candidate! God is very much in the business of drawing hookers, miscreants, sickos, and plenty of other weirdos to Himself because He delights in showing off His glory by showing how a life can be dramatically changed! Watch out that your goodie two shoes political views don't shut the doors to the Kingdom of Heaven in people's faces! (Matt. 23:13)

Naturally, people were livid about what Jesus was saying...

28 When they heard (all that He said), everyone in the synagogue was enraged. 29 They got up, drove him out of town, and brought him to the edge of the hill that their town was built on, intending to hurl him over the cliff. 30 But he passed right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30)

Again, the people became enraged since Jesus was implying that God's grace would be withheld from them and given to the Gentiles.¹⁶ These devout religious folks were majorly annoyed, to the point of wanting to martyr Jesus right on the spot. And for what? Calling out their apathy? Calling out their lack of faith? Offering salvation to those open to it and in desperate need of it?

But these kats couldn't kill Jesus at this moment. Somehow, miraculously, He passed right through the crowd and on His way. God wouldn't allow Jesus to die yet. Jesus's death would be at the appointed time and place.¹⁷ He had some stuff to accomplish on His way to the cross, resurrection, and ascension!

Christ became weird in a whole lot of ways for all the weirdos who would follow Him! He taught the wild, weird ways of God to a religious and secular culture that rejected them.

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He got murdered. He was buried. He rose again on the third day and weirdly appeared to many different people in bodily form. He wildly and weirdly ascended to heaven. He sent the Holy Spirit down to make people so weird that everyone thought they were drunk at the first outpouring. (Acts 2:15)

And you can guarantee that if Jesus moves in your life, He'll make you a weirdo somehow for Him! Don't stop throwing granny shots at the foul line! Lean into Him! Persist in Him! Live for Him no matter what anybody else thinks!