

Sermon: Early Rejection

Text: Luke 4:14-30

Gary L. Wackler

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Introduction: We know from John's gospel that Jesus was in ministry for about a year after the record of his temptation experience in the wilderness (Luke 4) before he arrives in Nazareth. Luke takes this occasion to drive home his particular theological emphasis. Jesus was announcing he was God's Messiah. Luke wants us to know the importance of the Holy Spirit, witness, and Word. Jesus continues his use of Scripture to point out who he is and his agenda. It is also clear that it is frequently the religious people who are the hardest to convince of Jesus' mission and purpose.

Even though Luke writes primarily to a Gentile audience he affirms Jesus' Jewishness. In our text today, we see Jesus supporting "the Sabbath, the Scriptures, and the synagogue" (s. Craddock, *Luke*, p. 61).

Luke 4:14-16 (NIV) ¹⁴Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶He 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.

Jesus had been in many of the synagogues in Galilee, and now he was going home for a visit to reintroduce himself to family and friends and to talk about his mission.

There are expressions like "familiarity breeds contempt" and "it's impossible to go home" that have truth in them. There is a place we all call home, and the longer one spends there, the deeper the feelings (for Teresa and I, it is Piqua, Ohio).

Galilee was the most progressive and least conservative part of Palestine. Josephus, the Jewish historian, reported there were 204 villages or towns, none less than 15,000 inhabitants. It was the law that anywhere there were ten Jewish families there had to be a synagogue. We also know from our text that it was Jesus' habit (custom) to be found in a synagogue on the Sabbath.

It was the custom of the synagogue to read from the books of Moses (Pentateuch) every sabbath. This Scripture was divided up into 154 or more sections so as to cover it in 3-3 1/2 years. At least seven persons would read at least three verses. Each person's reading would be translated (Targum) into Greek and Aramaic because many of the common people did not understand classical Hebrew.

“Jesus and his disciples may very well have been educated as children in one of these synagogue schools.”

- Bruce Metzger, *The New Testament, its background, growth and content*, p. 59

On a given Sabbath readers were given opportunity to read from the Prophets giving their own interpretation. Enter Jesus.

Luke 4:17-21 (NIV)¹⁷The 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, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰Then 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, ²¹and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

I. The People Rejected God’s Messiah.

In verse 21 Jesus makes it clear that He is the Messiah, God’s Anointed One, and you could hear the gasp, because:

A. Jesus did not fit their conception.

When the people heard this clearly messianic passage from Isaiah 61 they had their own concept of what the Messiah would look and act like. They took more of a literal view of things rather than a figurative or spiritual method of interpretation.

When the Jews heard the word “anointed,” their minds went back to a king and political power that could be applied externally.

Jesus would be more of a “suffering servant,” whereas the people thought of the Messiah as a monarch. Yet, Jesus’ ministry would be more powerful and lasting than anything they could imagine. Jesus’ influence would change hearts and minds.

When the Jews heard that the Messiah would have “good news” for the poor, God must have meant more than those who had very little to live on. Although many of Jesus’ followers would be financially poor, he would have affluent followers, too.

Jesus did say:

Matthew 26:11 (NIV)¹¹The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me.

If you look at Jesus' life, he did not chase after wealth and belongings, but said clearly:

Luke 12:33 (NIV) ³³Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

It was the “poor in spirit” who were most open to the good news of the gospel.

The synagogue congregation most certainly also heard in Isaiah 61 that the Messiah would “heal the brokenhearted” (see KJV, missing in NIV). This also should be taken figuratively. It is not that Jesus is against physical wellness. He is simply more concerned about your spiritual condition.

Again those assembled that Saturday morning heard about a Messiah who would produce “freedom for the prisoners.”

The Apostles Peter and Paul would be miraculously released from prison, but John the Baptist would be incarcerated and then beheaded for working for the Messiah.

Jesus must have meant another kind of bondage from which he could produce a new life. All kinds of sins, you name them, have people trapped in addiction, guilt and shame.

The Messiah was to cause “recovery of sight for the blind.” The Apostle John always tried to make it clear that even miracles (signs) were for a more important spiritual reason. After healing the blind man in John 9 Jesus completes the lesson:

John 9:39-41 (NIV) ³⁹Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.” ⁴⁰Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?” ⁴¹Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

Finally the Messiah, who Jesus declares He is, will “release the oppressed.” The Greek word (αφεσις) is about release from captivity, the idea of being pardoned, and a cancellation of an obligation (debt). It ties in with the forgiveness of sin.

This is all in the context of the year of Jubilee celebrated every 50 years where all debts were forgiven and all slaves freed. When the Messiah comes everything was going to be put right they thought.

As Christians we are to spread the good news of the Messiah's reign.

II Corinthians 6:2 (NIV) ²For he says, “In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God's favor, now is the day of salvation.

B. The people thought his credentials were inadequate.

The crowd gathered in the hometown synagogue was initially impressed by Jesus. **Luke 4:22 (NIV)** ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

It’s the same thing when I go home. I am still Ray and Betty’s oldest boy with all that that means.

Jesus was Joseph’s son by their way of thinking. That meant he came from poor beginnings, was born under a cloud of scandal, and had no real obvious great accomplishments on his résumé. It may be too that Jesus wasn’t much to look at. One of my favorite preachers (sorry about this) is short, balding, and talks with a southern accent (which automatically puts him under suspicion). Fred Craddock, to someone off the street - they would not be impressed until he spoke.

Susan Boyle of “Britain’s Got Talent” fame is not impressive to look at, but what a voice! “You can’t judge a book by its cover,” but people do everyday.

II. The People Rejected God’s Methods.

From the very beginning God wanted “all” his creation to be redeemed and brought back into a right relationship with him, but the Jews:

A. They felt privileged.

They were of the seed of Abraham. They had a covenant with God marked by circumcision. They were his “chosen people.” And they had the Law.

The Jews felt that if anyone would know what the Messiah would look like and do, it was them. They were blinded to God’s methods because they thought only about the physical rewards and not the more precious spiritual gifts God could give them.

They had constantly got it wrong.

Matthew 23:37-39 (NIV) ³⁷“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. ³⁸Look, your house is left to you desolate. ³⁹For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

This day’s rejection was a microcosm of what all the Jews would do in Jerusalem later. They would reject and kill their Messiah because he did not measure up to their idea.

B. They were resentful.

Luke 4:23-24 (NIV) ²³Jesus 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.’” ²⁴“I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

Jesus knew their hearts. He recognized their small faith. The Jews wanted to see the miracles that Jesus was reported to have done in other villages. Yet, the whole thing sounded like what Luke had recorded earlier in chapter 4. It was the voice of Satan demanding the spectacular (“throw yourself down from here”), and sight rather than faith.

The resentment grew with Jesus’ sharing of Scripture. No one likes to be accused!

III. The People Rejected God’s Word.

A. The people were furious with the personal application.

“For Luke the tension that erupts here and will erupt again and again elsewhere is not between Jesus and Judaism or between synagogue and church; it is between Judaism and its own Scriptures.” - Craddock, *Luke*, p.63

Luke 4:25-28 (NIV) ²⁵I 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. ²⁶Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷And 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.” ²⁸All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

Mark Twain, not exactly a model for Christianity wrote once, “Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me the most are those I do understand.”

The people of Jesus’ hometown understood. When Israel was far from God and his will, grace was extended to the Gentiles. This was a precursor of what would happen on Pentecost as the church spreads away from Jerusalem. The Holy Spirit will send his representatives where there is a desire to follow God. Churches today need to learn from the past and develop a hunger for reading the Word and doing God’s will. Jesus said:

John 8:37-38 (NIV) ³⁷I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. ³⁸I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father.”

B. The people were establishing a deadly pattern.

Luke 4:29-30 (NIV) ²⁹They 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. ³⁰But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Jerusalem would be destroyed because of her refusal to accept the Messiah. Generations would be lost because of sin and pride.

A deafness and dullness to the Word of God is something predicted by the Old Testament prophets.

Amos 8:11-12 (NIV) ¹¹“The days are coming,” declares the Sovereign LORD, “when I will send a famine through the land— not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the LORD. ¹²Men will stagger from sea to sea and wander from north to east, searching for the word of the LORD, but they will not find it.

With the influence of the internet we know a lot of things, with cable and Dish TV we can watch our favorite items. There is even a menu and guide. We can watch what we want when we want, yet the truth is that the things that will bring us “real” life and lead us to God - the Word of God, is pushed aside as being inconvenient or worse: convicting of the kind of lives we choose to live no matter what God says.

Conclusion: As contemporary followers of Jesus Christ we need to be careful that we are not like those who showed disregard for God’s Word. To the Sadducees:

Mark 12:24 (NIV) ²⁴Jesus replied, “Are you not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?”

Today, many Christians and many churches are weak because they do not read the word. They are dying because they have no hunger for God’s Word.

Illus. Bible study and doctor’s offices have something in common. We do not always want to hear what needs to be said and understood. But if we would only open our hearts and minds maybe we could experience life the way it is supposed to be. Jesus, the Great Physician has good news for us.

Whenever anyone rejects Jesus’ authority over him, that person must repent and turn and follow Jesus.

Mark 1:14-15 (NIV) ¹⁴After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. ¹⁵“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!”

The Church was started with these words:

Acts 2:38-39 (NIV) ³⁸Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”

Revelation 3:3 (NIV) ³Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

The Word of God can be a blessing or judgment; it is up to us.

Invitation: *Open My Eyes That I May See*