

16. Rejection and acceptance

January 17, 2016

We all would like to be accepted, not rejected. Facebook is doing very well with two very familiar features – “Friend” and “Like.” If you are an average person, you don’t like to be rejected by anyone, especially by someone close to you or someone whom you love. That’s the reason adultery and divorce are the ultimate personal rejections between husband and wife and cause nasty conflicts.

There was one Person who was rejected by all mankind – Jesus.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

At the beginning of His earthly ministry, He was rejected by His own town people – Nazareth where He grew up. Not very long after that, He was accepted by total strangers who became His disciples for about 3 years. But when He was arrested, they, too, rejected Him to save their own skin.

This morning we are going to meet the people of Nazareth who rejected Him and also meet His disciples in Galilee who accepted the Savior. I believe that the Lord has a lesson or two for us.

A. JOHN THE BAPTIST IN PRISON

Luke 3:19-20 But Herod the tetrarch, being rebuked by him concerning Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and for all the evils which Herod had done, 20 also added this, above all, that he shut John up in prison.

The story behind these two verses was a major Hollywood style soap opera. Herod Antipas, not Herod the Great who tried to kill the Child Jesus, had several half brothers, and one of them had married the ambitious, vicious and tricky Herodias – the daughter of another half brother. Antipas dumped and disgraced his wife, he eventually married this wicked Herodias.

John the Baptist had the courage to bring this dark secret into the light. And for that, he was thrown into prison and eventually beheaded by Herodias’ vengeance. I am sure that you all have heard, “Hell has no fury like a woman scorned.” That’s Herodias.

B. BEGINNING HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Luke 4:14-15 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. 15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Though Jesus was already filled with the Spirit, He continues to walk in the Spirit – and in the power of the Spirit – after experiencing victory over temptation in the wilderness. The region of Galilee was a fertile, progressive, and highly populated region. According to figures from the Jewish historian Josephus, there were some 3 million people populating Galilee, an area smaller than the state of Connecticut.

C. THE ONES WHO REJECTED JESUS

Luke 4:16-30 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. 17 And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: 18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me (1) To

preach the gospel to the poor; (2) He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, (3) To proclaim liberty to the captives And (4) recovery of sight to the blind, (5) To set at liberty those who are oppressed; 19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD." 20 Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. 21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" 23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'" 24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 25 But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land; 26 but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 27 And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." 28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. 30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

Ever since His family's return from Egypt when Jesus was a young child, Nazareth had been His home. He could greet folks by name as He passed them on the streets, and they knew His name. By now, the news had spread widely about the miracle-worker from their own town. So His family, friends, and neighbors were anxious to see and hear Him again.

It was our Lord's custom to attend public worship, a custom His followers should imitate today. He might have argued that the "religious system" was corrupt, or that He didn't need the instruction. But instead, He made His way to the place of prayer on the Sabbath. If anyone didn't need to "go to church," it was Jesus – yet, it was His custom to go to church.

Hebrews 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Some people say, "I don't have to go to church to believe in God." That is true. But if that person truly believes in God and wants to do what the Lord says, he or she would do what the Lord did and told us to do. In most cases, not attending the church services regularly is nothing more than a lame excuse to be disobedient to the Lord's command and thinking oneself better than others which is pride and a sin itself.

In v17, Jesus was asked to read the Scripture text and to give the sermon. The passage He read included Isaiah 61:1-2, and He selected it for His "text." The Jewish rabbis interpreted this passage to refer to the Messiah, and the people in the synagogue knew it.

In this Messianic prophecy, the Messiah announces that He is here to heal the fivefold damage that sin brings. Sin has caused great damage, so there needs to be a great work of redemption:

- 1) Sin impoverishes, and the Messiah will bring Good News to the spiritually poor.
- 2) Sin breaks hearts, and the Messiah has Good News for the brokenhearted.
- 3) Sin makes people captive and enslaves them, and the Messiah has come to set them free.
- 4) Sin blinds us, and the Messiah has come to heal our spiritual and moral blindness.
- 5) Sin oppresses its victims, and the Messiah comes to bring liberty to the oppressed.

However, Jesus didn't read the entire v2 of Isaiah 61. He stopped in the middle. Let's go to the text:

Isaiah 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn

Why did Jesus stop in the middle of the text? Because v1 and the first part of v2 were to be fulfilled by Jesus at His First Coming, while the rest is a reference to His Second Coming that is going to happen after the Great Tribulation in the future.

In this Luke 4:21, Jesus answered two questions:

"Who did Isaiah write of?" Jesus answered that question, "Isaiah wrote of Me."
 "When will this come to pass?" Jesus answered that question, "Isaiah wrote of now."

You can imagine how shocked they were when Jesus boldly said that it was written about Him and that He had come to usher in the "acceptable year of the Lord."

The audience of Nazareth synagogue was impressed that their home boy Jesus' teaching, but they would not believe in Him as the Messiah. Because they saw Him only as the son of Mary and Joseph, the Boy they had watched grow up in their own town. Besides, they were more interested in a dog and pony miracle show they wanted to see from Jesus according to v23.

At first, they admired the way He taught, but it didn't take long for their admiration to turn into antagonism. Why? Because Jesus began to remind them of God's goodness to the Gentiles. I asked you to underline two people's names. The Prophet Elijah bypassed all Jewish widows and helped a Gentile widow in Sidon in 1 Kings 17, and his successor Elisha healed a Gentile leper general Nahum from Syria in 2 Kings 5.

Our Lord's message of grace was a blow to the proud Jewish exclusivism, and they would not repent. Imagine this hometown Boy saying that Jews had to be saved by God's grace like the pagan Gentiles. They didn't take it very well.

As it was two thousand years ago, people still love truth when it enlightens them, but hate truth when it convicts them and reveals their shortcomings. Some will ignore the truth as if it would go away, or they actively fight against it by including believing deception like many seeker sensitive churches' doctrines that teach cheap grace and not talking about the people's sins so that they wouldn't offend them.

The people in Nazareth and the majority of the people in the world reject Jesus because who He is and what He teaches them don't align with what they want.

D. THE ONES WHO ACCEPTED JESUS

Luke 5:1-11 So it was, as the multitude pressed about Him to hear the word of God, that He stood by the Lake of Gennesaret, 2 and saw two boats standing by the lake; but the fishermen had gone from them and were washing their

nets. 3 Then He got into one of the boats, which was Simon's, and asked him to put out a little from the land. And He sat down and taught the multitudes from the boat. 4 When He had stopped speaking, He said to Simon, "Launch out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." 5 But Simon answered and said to Him, "Master, we have toiled all night and caught nothing; nevertheless at Your word I will let down the net." 6 And when they had done this, they caught a great number of fish, and their net was breaking. 7 So they signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish which they had taken; 10 and so also were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid. From now on you will catch men." 11 So when they had brought their boats to land, they forsook all and followed Him.

The scene was changed from Nazareth to Gennesaret which was located about 18 miles northeast of Nazareth. It was on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee.

This event is not the same one as it is described in Matthew 4:18-22 and Mark 1:16-20. Because, in those accounts, Peter and Andrew were busy fishing, but in this account, they had fished all night and caught nothing and were washing their nets. Jesus had enlisted Peter, Andrew, James, and John earlier, but then they went back to their trade. Now He would call them to a life of full-time discipleship.

Jesus used Peter's ship as a platform from which to address the huge crowd on the shore. At the same time, Peter became a "captive audience" as he sat in the ship listening to the Word of God. The late Dr. J. Vernon McGee said, "Every pulpit is a fishing boat, a place to give out the Word of God and attempt to catch fish."

We sometimes feel like those discouraged fishermen when our ingenuity proves fruitless and our best efforts come up empty. But it's in those times of dark weakness that God often surprises us with the bright rays of His grace and power:

2 Corinthians 12:9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In my opinion, Peter still had a twisted and cynical attitude and wanted to show Jesus who was better at fishing. After all, Jesus was a carpenter by trade, and what do carpenters know about fishing? It was a well-known fact that, in the Sea of Galilee, you catch fish at night in the shallow water, not in the daytime in the deep water. What Jesus asked Peter to do in v4 was contrary to all of Peter's training and experience.

Jesus wasn't giving these rough and seasoned fishermen a lesson in fishing. His objective was to change their lives. Jesus chose uneducated men, but He taught them for over three years. You don't need fancy degrees and education to start out in ministry, but you must enroll yourself in the Seminary of the Word of God where the Holy Spirit is the Dean of the school.

I am sure that we all have noticed in our own life, too, that God doesn't go by our own logic, calculation, and schedule which drives us crazy all the time. What He

asks us to do often is opposite of what we want to do. That is when our faith in Him has to come in and obey His instruction.

Once Peter saw the catch of the century, he suddenly realized that he stood in the presence of deity. As Peter recognized Jesus for who He is, the Messiah, he also saw himself for who he was – a sinful man.

Whenever we have a vision of who Jesus really is, it will always give us a realistic perspective of who we really are, as well. We fail to see the truth about ourselves until we see ourselves in His light. Seeing ourselves in His light always brings convictions. Then, it is very easy to accept our Lord for who He is.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Rejecting what Jesus teaches us to do is not something we should take lightly. It is the same as telling Him that we are better than Him and don't need His instruction. If we reject Him and His teachings, expect the consequences of our own choices.

2) Accepting what Jesus teaches us to do takes more than a lip service. It requires our mindset and lifestyle. It includes standing alone against the carnal, popular, and ungodly currents of this world.