

7. Recognizing the Messiah

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More and more people around the world choose to ignore the identity of Jesus Christ. It is as if they ignore Him long enough, He would be stop existing or He wouldn't be God. What an absurd way to think!

The people from His own hometown Nazareth had the same mindset. They chose not to recognize Him as their Messiah because of their shallow knowledge about Him. However, the demons which once possessed people and the sickness that gave nothing but despair to the people recognized the authority of Jesus and obey Him instantly. Do you recognize Him as your Savior and the Lord?

A. BEGINNING HIS EARTHLY MINISTRY

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. 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.

B. REJECTED IN NAZARETH

Luke 4:16-20 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.

Ever since His return from Egypt when He was a preschooler, 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 Nazareth. So His family, friends and neighbors were anxious to see and hear Him.

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 on the Sabbath to the place of prayer. If anyone didn't need to "go to church," it was Jesus – yet, it was His custom to do so.

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 believe in God, 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 an excuse to be disobedient to the Lord's command and thinking oneself better than others which is pride and a sin itself.

A typical synagogue service is pretty similar to our own service:

- 1) The worship part in which prayer was offered
- 2) The reading of the Scriptures
- 3) The teaching part by one of the men of the congregation or perhaps by a visiting rabbi.

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 prophecy, the Messiah announces that He is here to heal the fivefold damage that sin brings. Sin has done 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.

C. NOT RELIGION, BUT FAITH IN GOD

Luke 4:21-27 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."

In v21, Jesus answers 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 a home boy Jesus' teaching, but they would not believe in Him as the Messiah. They saw Him only as the son of Mary and Joseph, the Boy they had watched grow up in their own city. Besides they were more interested in a dog and pony miracle show they want to see from Jesus according to v23.

At first, they admired the way He taught, but it didn't take long for their admiration turn into antagonism. Why? Because Jesus began to remind them of God's goodness to the Gentiles. The Prophet Elijah bypassed all Jewish widows and helped a Gentile widow in Sidon in 1 Kings 17:8-16, and his successor Elisha healed a Gentile leper general Nahum from Syria in 2 Kings 5:1-15.

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

As it was in two thousand years ago, people still love truth when it enlightens them, but hate truth when it accuses 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 nowadays.

D. IT IS NOT A GOOD DAY TO DIE

Luke 4:28-30 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.

There is an old American Indian's saying, "It is a good day to die." However, this was not Jesus' day to die yet.

From marveling at Jesus' gracious words to willing hearts to kill Him is quite a shift in attitude which also repeated in the last week of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. Once they shouted, "Hosanna, blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord." But in a few days, the same people cried out, "Crucify Him."

This is quite a response to a sermon. I am glad that you guys are not like these people from Nazareth. I would have been so dead by now.

We need to pay attention on three things regarding criticism:

- 1) Criticism always comes when we least need it or least deserve it.
- 2) Criticism comes from people who are least qualified to give it.
- 3) Criticism frequently comes in a form that is least helpful to us.

But not all criticism is wrong and harmful. Every critique provides an opportunity to grow. Forget the critic. It's far more important to consider the criticism, especially if it comes from more than one source.

E. AUTHORITY OVER A DEMON

Luke 4:31-37 Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths. 32 And they were astonished at His teaching, for His word was with authority. 33 Now in the synagogue there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, 34 saying, "Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God!" 35 But Jesus rebuked him, saying, "Be quiet, and come out of him!" And when the demon had thrown him in their midst, it came out of him and did not hurt him. 36 Then they were all amazed and spoke among themselves, saying, "What a word this is! For with authority and power He commands the unclean spirits, and they come out." 37 And the report about Him went out into every place in the surrounding region.

Jesus left Nazareth and set up His headquarters in Capernaum, the hometown of Peter, Andrew, James and John. He taught regularly in the synagogue and astonished the people by the authority of His message and the authority over the demons and sickness.

It is ironic that the demons know who Jesus is, but the chosen people – people in His own city, didn't appreciate who Jesus was. The manner of Jesus' dealings with the demon in this passage is a clear demonstration of His power and authority over the spirit realm unlike the idea from Hollywood that God and Satan are the archenemies.

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

There are a few things we should notice in demonic possession:

- 1) Demons are able to possess the people who get themselves into the realm where demons dominate, such as Ouija board games, Dungeon and Dragon's games, any occultic games, books and movies. When people dabble with these kinds of garbage, they are exposing themselves to the demonic influences and even to possession.
- 2) Demons use human bodies to carry out their wicked schemes.
- 3) Demons know who Jesus is and obey Him.

It is in His name that we defend ourselves against the demons.

You may think that all this demon possession is an ancient story. But I strongly believe demonic possession is still going on and have eyewitnessed it. We may have different psychiatric names for those who are suffering demon possessions, such as some of the people who are suffering with split personalities, uncontrollable outburst of anger and violence and so on. However, I am not saying that all the people who are in those situations are demon possessed.

F. AUTHORITY OVER A SICKNESS

Luke 4:38-39 Now He arose from the synagogue and entered Simon's house. But Simon's wife's mother was sick with a high fever, and they made request of Him concerning her. 39 So He stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she arose and served them.

First of all, this proves beyond any shadow of doubt that Peter was married.

According to the present day Roman Catholic standards for the priesthood, Peter was not qualified to be a priest, let alone the first "Pope".

Sometimes God heals a person physically in a snap. Other times, healing – physical or emotional – comes slowly. Or not at all in this lifetime. We don't know why, but we must depend on the sovereignty of God for who gets to be healed or not.

Even the sickness don't have a problem recognizing the Son of the Living God, the Messiah Jesus Christ.

By the way, some commentators say that Jesus made only one mistake during His earthly ministry – healing the mother-in-law of Peter. What a horrible thing to say about mother-in-law!

I'd like to speak to those who are going through difficulties physically, emotionally, financially and spiritually. I believe that that covers the vast number of people in just about any group. Listen to me, please. While we go through that dark tunnel, it is really easy to have a tunnel vision – looking after Number One, ourselves.

Take your eyes off from your current situations and recognize who Jesus is in your life. Focus on Him and who He is and what He can do. Then look around yourself. See if you can minister to others who are in the same situation or even worse than yours. You might even realize that what you go through is pale to compare with the other person's situation.

In addition to that, you might even notice that your difficult situation starts to look better for some reason. Don't say, "When I am in a better situation, I will start." No, you start it now.

G. SOLITUDE WITH THE FATHER IN HEAVEN

Luke 4:40-44 When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. 41 And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!" And He, rebuking them, did not allow them to speak, for they knew that He was the Christ. 42 Now when it was day, He departed and went into a deserted place. And the crowd sought Him and came to Him, and tried to keep Him from leaving them; 43 but He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent." 44 And He was preaching in the synagogues of Galilee.

Sun setting marks the start of a new day in Israel, the day after the sabbath. The people had to wait until the Sabbath was over to come to Jesus. Religious tradition kept them from receiving from God at that moment.

Notice after the long day's work, Jesus chose to spend time with the Father alone in a deserted place. Folks, we don't need to fill every single moment with some sounds or activities. Spend solitude time with God. Talk to Him as you talk with your friend. He loves to hear from you. You'll get to learn His heart and even learn to recognize His voice.

H. APPLICATIONS

1) Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord of our lives is not an option.

2) Recognizing Jesus as the Messiah and the Lord of our lives is a must while we go through difficult times in our lives.