
Luke 4.16-30 tells of Jesus’ first sermon preached at the Synagogue in his hometown. Although Luke isn’t the only gospel writer to record this story in his gospel, some important details that are left out in the other gospels reveals some very important truths about Jesus, his ministry and how certain people responded. For example, only Luke describes the anger and frustration of the people of Nazareth, who were so upset they wanted to kill him by throwing him off a cliff.

What could Jesus have said to solicit such an extreme response? Where does an anger like that come from? If Jesus has come to help people and love people and care for people, this text does not make a lot of sense.

The answer lies in the content of Jesus’ message. Jesus begins by quoting the Prophet Isaiah about the future coming of the Messianic kingdom. This topic was both popular and exciting to the Jews in Nazareth. The hope of the coming Kingdom was not the problem. Jesus did not preach the wrong text.

It’s really hard for us to appreciate the atmosphere of Messianic expectation that existed among the common people in the towns and villages of Judea and Galilee. There was much debate about the nature and purpose of the Messianic Kingdom. Waiting is not only hard... it’s eternally dangerous. Waiting can cause people to misunderstand and misinterpret the promises of God. Years of study and suffering caused them to believe in a future Kingdom that was centered around their hopes and not God’s eternal purpose.

They were fine with Jesus being the Messiah they wanted. They were not happy with Jesus being the Messiah that God wanted.

And so Jesus reminded them of Israel’s history. This was not the first time God’s people were frustrated with his plan for them. Jesus told the story about the prophet Elijah and the widow of Zarephath, and Naaman the leper. What do those two stories have in common? Both describe God sending his prophet to Gentiles. Jesus is rejected for the content of his message because it fits outside their limited view of the Messianic Kingdom. They are willing to listen only if Jesus tells them what they want to hear.

The content of Jesus’ message is the point of contention with his audience. Jesus clearly explains through these OT stories that the Messianic Kingdom of God will not only include Gentiles, but God is actively pursuing them to be included in his plan because his own people are resistant to his gospel.

We face a similar danger of trying to make the Kingdom fulfill our hopes. We face a similar temptation to wrap the Mission of God around our schedule. We face a similar disconnect when we use the Gospel to try and satisfy our expectations.

The Gospel, Kingdom, and Mission of God are, first of all, determined by him and for his glory. Our responsibility is not to judge God’s plan but to submit and be blessed by it.

Understand the story...

Read Isaiah 61

Most Jews understood the Messiah as a ruler who would come for the chosen race (Jews) only. This caused most Jews to fall in love with their genealogy rather than being in love with God, which in turn blinded them from Jesus being the Messiah described in Isaiah 61.

Why did the people in the synagogue turn from amazement, to doubt, and finally to anger concerning Jesus?

Read Matthew 13.53-58.
What were some of the specific reasons these people didn’t believe that Jesus was the Messiah?

Living out the story...

Read Isaiah 58

The Jews fell into the trap of believing their heritage, or their laws and regulations would save them, and so they became complacent with the condition of their hearts and souls. What areas in your spiritual walk are you simply going through the motions? How can we guard against letting our pursuit of righteousness become monotonous? What are some practical things we can do this week to spread the gospel through the way we live?

Think back to a time in your life when someone received something that you felt you deserved. What were your emotions? How did you react? Why did you feel like you deserved it?

Pray this week that we would have hearts that are always seeking to grow, be sanctified, and show the world the love of Jesus through not just what we say, but the way that we live our lives.