

Before we even look at our passage today... I want to tell you the point of this message that I want to drive home. (Please consider it carefully.) ...

Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love. ... [P A U S E] ...

What we are about to see... is that in one moment of time... Jesus will go from having the crowd's amazement... praise... and adoration – to such *animosity*... that the people wanted to throw Him over the edge of the cliff.

Today we come to Luke's description of the **beginning** of Jesus' ministry... and the very same thing that we see *during His final week* (the week known as "Passion Week") also happened at the *beginning*. Just like the end of His life (here on earth)... You will remember that they were shouting (one moment) "*Hosanna to the King*"... waving palm branches and recognizing that He was Messiah... and the very next moment... they were an angry mob shouting "*Kill Him!*"... only a few days later.

Luke is setting the tone (or overview) of Jesus' ministry... with today's passage. Strong adulation... followed by immediate rejection... is the character of Christ's ministry. ... Uh Oh! ... Is this what YOU and I signed-up for...? Is this to be normal ministry for you and I... as Christ-followers? Should we expect rejection?

As I pointed out last week... John 15:20 reads:

John 15:20 (ESV)

²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

We need to prepare ourselves. Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love. ...

... [P A U S E] ...

Our opening two verses (Luke 4:14-15) will summarize about 1 year of Christ's ministry... after His temptation by Satan in the wilderness... and then His baptism by John. From where we left off last week... to our passage today... about a year of ministry (filled with exultation and praise) has elapsed. Jesus has established a home-base for ministry in Capernaum and reports about Him are beginning to spread far and wide. He is experiencing a lot of popular attention. A figure of significance is emerging. ... This One (Who resisted the devil) is now moving among the people and bringing His message.

Luke 4:14-15

He arrived back in His boyhood village of Nazareth where He knew every house and shop... and He knew everyone by name. ... He knew who baked the best bread... who shortchanged his customers... who bullied his wife... and who helped the poor.

His custom was to attend the synagogue on the Sabbath. ... Doubtless... on this Sabbath the place was packed. ... He had taken His place in the synagogue every Sabbath for thirty years. ... And... in later years... He had read the Scriptures and made observations about them. ... As usual... the seats of honor were filled by the village "*worthies*," ... the rulers of the synagogue... and the local rabbi.

The usual prayers were said and liturgies performed... and then the time came for the Scriptures to be read. ... Someone handed the Lord the book

of Isaiah... probably a scroll containing some of Isaiah's prophecy... and He expertly found the place that He wanted. Of course... there were no chapter divisions or verse divisions. (Those came much later... around 1227 A.D.)

But what was MUCH LATER designated as Isaiah 61:1–2 in our Bible... is where He read. ... It was a well-known passage:

Luke 4:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Many of the people present in that synagogue knew that Scripture by heart. They expected Him to complete the sentence—"and the day of vengeance of our God." ... (Instead) He closed the book and returned it to the custodian. Then He sat down.

Every eye was fixed on Him. (For a year) Galilee had been amazed by His miracles — the kind of miracles and the kind of ministry foretold by Isaiah - as just quoted. ... The nation at large... while delighted with His miracles... was really looking for Him to pour out the vengeance of God on the Romans. ... What would He say about that? He said Nothing! ... (The day for that kind of thing had not yet come. It still has not come.)

Just the same... His words exploded like a bomb when He ended the silence and began speaking. ... First... He (*Joseph and Mary's boy*) announced that He was the *Christ* - the Anointed One! - the One of whom Isaiah had written these words!

The people in the synagogue could find no fault. ... His grace and power were evident to everyone. ... But a reaction was already building. The village carpenter's son — the very Christ? How is this possible..?! They waited. ... Surely some monumental miracle would now endorse this claim. But no miracle came.

Then He started speaking again: "*You will surely say to Me this proverb: "Physician, heal yourself: what we have been hearing you've done in Capernaum... do it (now) also here in Your hometown!"* ... But (instead) Jesus had a proverb of His Own to quote: "No prophet is accepted in his own country." He followed this blunt observation with two shocking illustrations from the Old Testament.

"In the days of Elijah, there were many widows", He said.

"Yet when the great famine blanketed the land, the famine that lasted three and a half years, the prophet was sent to none of them. On the contrary, he was sent to a widow who lived in Sarepta, a city of Sidon—Jezebel's country, no less. ... Later, in the days of Elisha, there were many lepers in Israel. The prophet cleansed none of them. On the contrary, he cleansed Naaman the Syrian."

NOTICE: At this very early stage in His public ministry... the Lord revealed that He loved Gentiles - just as much as He loved Jews.

The people in the synagogue became angry. Instead of miracles... He gave them a lecture and a most unpalatable one at that. ... The synagogue erupted and they "rose up... and thrust Him out of the city... and led Jesus to the brow of the hill where their city [Nazareth] was built"... determined to throw Him to His death.

Luke 4:16-30

Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love. ... [P A U S E] ...

Jesus (initially) was a popular Teacher... so when He went back to His hometown... it was natural for Him to be asked to teach in the synagogue.

Synagogue worship in Jesus' day was very liturgical. Baptists tend to run in the opposite direction. ... For example... we don't like our prayers to be written out and read. It is assumed that a moderate amount of spontaneity is more consistent with the way the Holy Spirit leads a congregation to heart-felt worship. Formal liturgy is seen as mindless perfunctory actions that even non-believers can do... to make themselves appear to be religious. ... But we ought to be very careful. So can our "Spirit-led-looking-spontaneity..." ... Jesus was filled with the Spirit... and He worshiped with liturgy.

Synagogue worship in Jesus' day consisted of benedictions... recitation of the *Shema*... (*Shema Yisrael Adonai elo-hei-nu Adonai ehad*) "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" ... then came formal prayers... reading from the Law... and a selected reading from the Prophets... followed by the exposition of it as the reader sat down to explain. ... According to Alfred Edersheim... "Every Sabbath at least seven persons were called up to read. Each a portion... which was to consist of not less than three verses. ... The first reader began... and the last closed with a benediction.... Then came the reading of the law... which was followed by a lesson from the prophets. Jesus was asked to give the lesson from the prophets.

Luke 4:18-21

The passage that Jesus read and then spoke on... was a very familiar Messianic text. Everyone in the Synagogue knew it well... and it must have stunned everyone when He did not finish reading to the end of Isaiah's complete sentence. Jesus stopped at what would have been a comma... if the Hebrew language would have employed these grammar devices that we use in English.

Jesus read: "*He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor...*" then stopped without completing the rest of what Isaiah wrote – which was: "**And the day of vengeance of our God.**" Jesus only read about the Messiah's coming to show grace. He made NO mention (at all) that the Messiah would show vengeance.

Why...?

Because the purpose of Jesus' first coming was to proclaim the good news of salvation by grace through faith in the Messiah. The "day of vengeance" will come soon enough... when He comes again (the second time.) Right now... this part about grace is being fulfilled. The day of wrath will occur in the future (as predicted by John... in Revelation.) In our own day... as well as the days of Christ's earthly ministry... the Lord's anger against sin is held in reserve. ... Now is the time of grace... during which all who embrace the Messiah as their Savior will find mercy.

(In verse 19)... what did the Lord mean by the "*acceptable year of the Lord?*" ... This is a reference to the "*Year of Jubilee*" as described in Leviticus 25. ... Every seventh year was a "Sabbatical year" for the nation... when the land was allowed to rest. ... Crops were not planted. The soil could be replenished and insects could be kept under control... not

having crops to feed upon for that year. ... The Jubilee year was every 50th year. ... The main purpose of this special year was to balance or reset the economic system:

- * Slaves were set free and returned to their families,
- * Property that was sold reverted to the original owners,
- * All debts were cancelled.

In a spiritual sense... Jesus was proclaiming deliverance for the Jews. ... It was the dawning of a new era for this world's sighing... sobbing multitude. He presented Himself as the answer to all the ills that torment people. The shackles of sin would be broken by putting faith in Him. ... Those who were not only physically blind... but also spiritually blind... would receive spiritual sight by faith in Christ. ... Indeed... it was a spiritual "Year of Jubilee" for the nation of Israel! ... The sin debt of men and women would be forgiven or cancelled by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus was saying, "*I am the answer to your needs.*"

Jesus stood to read Scripture and then sat to teach. After hearing stories of His astounding miracles and authoritative teaching throughout Galilee... the hometown crowd sat with rapt attention. ... His mother... brothers... sisters... cousins... neighbors... and teachers all wondered what Jesus would say.

Jesus told them that He was their Messiah. The Jews had been awaiting the arrival of their Messiah for years... and now the Lord says to them (using this familiar Messianic passage) - "*I'm here!*"

His declaration may not have come as a surprise. He unequivocally identified Himself as the object of Isaiah's prediction about the Messiah.

But this may have been said often of Him in Nazareth... as Joseph and Mary probably told their story many times. ... Besides... talk of His ministry had taken all of Galilee by storm. ... Nevertheless... the crowd marveled at His teaching on grace.

Luke 4:22

Familiarity brought contempt. The very fact that the people of Nazareth were so well acquainted with Jesus' family caused them to look down upon Him. ... Who did He think He was anyway? ... If He wanted them to believe His claims... He needed to prove His greatness by performing here in Nazareth — better still... right here in the synagogue — a miracle similar to those He had (reportedly) worked around Capernaum and at the wedding in Cana.

Luke 4:23

Jesus proceeds to tell these people the truth... and in so doing... He sets off a bomb. ... Rapidly... the Lord will go from the mountain top to the edge of a cliff. ... He knows what they are thinking and openly addresses it. ... He anticipates they will tell him, "*Physician, heal thyself.*" What does this mean?

This was a common phrase used in His time. One meaning it carried was this: Suppose that a man should attempt to heal another when he was himself diseased in the same manner. It would be natural to ask him first to cure himself... before he attempted to cure others. ... "*Show us that you have the power... that you are worthy of our confidence... You profess to be able to deliver us from our maladies... our sins... our afflictions. Give us a sign of Your ability...*"

They were not willing to believe and accept His word and the truth of His message. They wanted a performance first! But that is not how God works... nor how we will see Jesus work throughout Luke's Gospel. God's way is: FIRST you need to believe! So He selects two examples that clearly show this.

Luke 4:24-27

Jesus does not elaborate on the theme of a prophet's being without honor in his land. ... Rather... He gives some examples that accomplish three things. **#1.** They suggest what a prophet may do as a result of rejection. ... He cites a low point in Israel's history (the time when Elijah and Elisha were rejected.) ... In this historical comparison... the threat is... that those closest to Jesus may miss God's blessing... while others... who are far away... will receive it. This is prophecy of what Jesus actually did. When the Jewish nation (as a whole) rejected Him... He turned to the Gentiles with the Gospel.

#2. Jesus refutes the people's mistaken opinion that Nazareth had a special claim on Him... since that was the place where He had been raised. They seemed to think that people living in other places should be treated as "*outsiders.*" Their attitude was: "*It has been reported to us that you have performed great works in Capernaum, but where do we come in?*"

So Jesus now shows that "There is a wideness to God's mercy that leaps over artificial... manmade barricades... like those of a village... city... province... and even country! ... (Elijah and Elisha passed over the Jews who were hurting... and performed miracles for non-Jews... from... and IN foreign countries.)

#3. (And this is a big reason for Jesus using these examples)... These Old Testament examples show the futility of demanding a miracle – **before** believing.

The story about the widow of Zaraphath (recorded in 1 Kings 17:7–16)... tells how Elijah encountered a woman gathering sticks to kindle a fire so she could bake a meal for her son and herself so... as she put it... “*we may eat it—and die.*” ... Elijah’s response was surprising:

1 Kings 17:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ And Elijah said to her, “Do not fear; go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son.¹⁴ For thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘The jar of flour shall not be spent, and the jug of oil shall not be empty, until the day that the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’”

Amazingly... the starving woman obeyed Elijah’s strange words... and for as long as the famine endured... she had flour and oil. ... If she had been like the people of Nazareth... she would have demanded a miracle first. ... But Elijah insisted that it be otherwise... and without any evidence... this Gentile woman gave her last meal to him.

In the other example that Jesus cites... Naaman (on the other hand) refused to believe. Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army and was sent by the king of Syria to be cured of leprosy. The Israelite king thought Syria was simply creating a pretext for war. But Elisha calmed him... directing that Naaman be sent to the prophet. ... Upon Naaman’s arrival... Elisha sent a messenger instructing him to go wash seven times in the Jordan and he would be cleansed.

2 Kings 5:11-12 (ESV)

¹¹ But Naaman was angry and went away, saying, “Behold, I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call upon the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the place and cure the leper. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?” So he turned and went away in a rage.

But (long story... short) Naaman’s servants convinced him to go back and obey... He returned and obeyed the prophet. THEN he was healed of his leprosy.

The application to the congregation in Nazareth was obvious. If they wanted evidence that Jesus is the promised Messiah... all they had to do was trust Him and then there would be ample evidence. Believe FIRST.

But the fine citizens of Nazareth had heard enough. ... It was bad enough to be told that they were poor and blind and captive and oppressed... but now to be told they were less spiritual and less wise than the despised *Gentiles* (Naaman and the widow)... “Well **THAT** is just too much!” ... In fact... they did not even sit through the rest of the synagogue service...

Luke 4:28-29

Why did the people of Nazareth react this way?

Because the Jews expected their Messiah to come and minister to them — to free them from oppression... heal them... usher in a glorious Kingdom. They also expected that with Messiah’s coming... the evil Gentiles would be overcome (put under their feet). ... Instead... Jesus... (who had just claimed to be the very Messiah about whom Isaiah prophesied)... instead of doing a miracle for them... lectured them about the prophets who had shown kindness to Gentiles! (Good grief! ... “oiu vey” in Hebrew.)

So Jesus went from the mountain top... to the edge of the cliff rapidly. When He told these people the truth... they were furious. They kicked the Lord out of Nazareth and led Him to the edge of the cliff to push Him off to the region below.

Do you see it? ... **Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love.** ... [P A U S E] ...

You may face this type of rejection in your own life too. You may go from the mountaintop to the edge of the cliff when you tell others the truth... especially the truth of the Scriptures. ... Some people are angered by the fact that they are sinners... and condemned to Hell... if they don't repent and put their faith in Jesus Christ alone for their salvation. ... Whether they like it or not... it is still the truth. ... Jesus did what was right... but still went from the mountaintop to the edge of the cliff. ... Luke used this experience early in Jesus' public career to show the polarizing effect the Lord had on those who encountered Him.

You may pay a price too... for doing what is right.

Luke 4:30

But Jesus "passed through their midst" is a statement that mildly suggests a miraculous escape. ... Luke doesn't offer any details of His escape; they aren't important. ... Jesus eluded their grasp because His time to die had not yet come.

(And) this pattern is seen throughout the rest of Jesus' ministry: Jesus went to the Jews; they rejected Him; He told of Gentile participation in the

kingdom; some Jews wanted to kill Him. But He was not killed until the proper time... when He chose to die.

... **Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love.** ... [P A U S E] ...

The Jews thought they were in control when they pushed the Lord toward the cliff, but the Lord miraculously escaped from their clutches. In the midst of anger... chaos... and pandemonium... He was still in control. He is in control when your life is like this too.

In spite of the rejection Jesus faced in Nazareth... He kept going forward. He did not give up or quit. ... He went on to the city of Capernaum where He preached with great power... and the people were astonished and spell-bound at His message.

(LISTEN!) there may be times where you feel like you are out of control and heading over a cliff. What do you do? You keep on going forward for Christ. Trust in Him and let Him control and lead your life.

** Job 13:15—Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him.*

** 1 Corinthians 15:58—Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*

** Proverbs 3:5–6 ... Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. [6] In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*

Every reader faces a choice upon reading this account: to identify with Jesus and his message of hope... or to give up and side with those who

reject Jesus. ... Jesus' safe departure suggests where the decision ought to reside.

As Luke will continue to show... people cannot bring Jesus to his death. Rather... Jesus will choose to offer Himself up in their behalf.

Will you and I follow Jesus correctly?

... **Following Christ has nothing to do with success as the world sees success. It has to do with love.**