

Sermon – 14/11/2010 am

Jesus Rejected At Nazareth

Study Text: Luke 4:22-30

I enjoy reading books written by Dr Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Many of his books are transcriptions of his sermons. Some years ago I bought a tape recording of his preaching. I was somewhat disappointed with what I heard. On another occasion I went to hear a famous New Testament scholar whose writings I had studied. Again I found him hard to listen to. I decided to stick with his writings.

What would it have been like listening to Jesus of Nazareth preaching? Imagine being in a church where Jesus was preaching! Many heard Jesus preaching in synagogues in Galilee some 2000 years ago. They were astonished at his preaching because he spoke with authority (4:32).

Words

Jesus spoke in the synagogue in his home town. His brothers and sisters were there (Matthew 13:55, 56), along with aunts and uncles and lots of friends no doubt. They also thought Jesus spoke with authority. A preacher reading the Bible and then saying 'Today this Scripture is fulfilled' is a man speaking with authority. Just how the people responded to this authority is what we find out in this passage.

On this particular Sabbath day in the synagogue in Nazareth the congregation witnessed Jesus read from the book of Isaiah and then preach from this Scripture. The word for 'witness' is often translated as 'they all spoke well of him'. But the word 'witness' does not necessarily carry a positive connotation. Some say it has a negative connotation meaning they witnessed or testified against Jesus. But we can also read it in a neutral sense.

And they *marvelled/wondered at his gracious words* (4:22). This seems to be a positive response to Jesus' preaching, but as it turned out there was no depth to this response. The preacher spoke well. The words they heard sounded good. They were gracious or favourable words. Maybe the people were pleasantly surprised that this local boy had made good – not that he had been away very long.

The wonder was not only at the words he spoke but that this was the son of the local carpenter. *Is this not Joseph's son?* they asked (4:22). The people heard Jesus speaking and even heard the words that he spoke but the words did not touch their hearts. They were too intent on looking at his pedigree and personal background.

Ironically they came up with the wrong answer as to his pedigree. Jesus was Mary's son but not Joseph's. Luke has already pointed this out to us as his readers, but even at that time if anyone knew about his pedigree it should have been his family in Nazareth. They knew the gossip about Jesus but not the truth.

Still today people can listen to a preacher; they can hear what he says but the words do not touch their hearts. Still today people can be side-tracked by things they have heard about the preacher. Rumours and gossip can easily block the hearts of those who hear the word preached. How can this man preach to us when his children are in so much trouble they might say? Some people are even side-tracked by the clothes the preacher wears.

This is not to say the life of the preacher is of no importance, but let us come to church to hear the word of God not to examine the preacher's pedigree or qualifications. The preacher must preach Christ and him crucified. The congregation must focus on the message not the man preaching.

Widows

Jesus came to Nazareth not only with the background of having grown up in this town but also with a reputation built up from his recent ministry. A man's reputation goes ahead of him as we say. The people had heard what Jesus had done down in Capernaum (4:23). It was Jesus who said this because he knew what they were thinking. Notice that he says what they had *heard* he had done, not what he had done. They did not necessarily believe what they heard.

The people in Nazareth were about to ask Jesus to perform a miracle for them. Jesus' preaching, even in the synagogues, was often accompanied by miracles; but he did not do such works in response to unbelief. He did such works in response to faith.

Jesus put a proverb into the mouths of his hearers in Nazareth. He anticipated them saying to him 'doctor heal yourself'. He anticipated them saying something like 'we have heard about your doing mighty works in other places so let us see what you can do in your home town'. In Mark's gospel we read that *Jesus could do no mighty works there ... and he marvelled at their unbelief* (Mark 6:5). He did not find any faith among the worshippers in his home town. Ironically they did see a miracle in the end. They saw Jesus escape from their hands as they tried to throw him over the cliff (4:30).

Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country (4:24). Jesus said these words as a solemn declaration. In Greek the first word is 'Amen'. We might translate 'Truly I say to you'. This is a proverb that appears to have originated with Jesus and from his observation of Old Testament history. It is a proverb we keep in mind today, especially in a small denomination like our own.

In the synagogue Jesus read from the same Scriptures that the people had listened to all their lives. He explained what these Scriptures meant. 'Today these words are fulfilled' he said. He read a passage about the Messiah. He told them in effect that he was the Messiah they had been waiting for.

What Jesus said to them after this might seem strange to us, as to them; as if Jesus was not exactly endearing himself to his audience. But they had already demonstrated their unbelief in saying 'is this not Joseph's son?' Besides, Jesus knew what was in their hearts.

Jesus went on to declare to these Jews the whole counsel of God. He had clearly preached the gospel. He was not going to keep on pleading with them. He was not going to pander to their unbelief. He would do as he later told his disciples to do. When they entered a town and were not received Jesus told them to shake the dust off their feet as they left (10:1). In the Bible that these people read it was clear that God was ready to bless the Gentiles when his own people, the Jews, rejected him.

Elijah was a prophet in the days of King Ahab and his wicked wife Jezebel. He announced God's judgment on the nation by way of a three and a half year drought. The resulting famine was terrible. The king tried to kill Elijah but God protected him. He first took him to a brook and then down to a town in the region of Sidon. It was there that Elijah miraculously provided food for a widow, a Gentile widow. Jesus pointed out that there were lots of needy widows in Israel at the time but Elijah was not sent to any of them.

Elisha was another prophet in Israel. Leprosy was a dreaded incurable disease in those days. A general in the army of Syria was a leper. He came to Elisha to be cured and he was cured. Elisha told him to go and dip in the Jordan seven times. He did so and was cleansed. Jesus pointed out to the Jews in the synagogue at Nazareth that there were a lot of Jewish lepers at the time but none of them was cleansed like Naaman the Syrian (4:27).

Wrath

Some think the Jews in Nazareth were particularly nationalistic. In any case they understood what Jesus was implying. He was not going to perform any miracles for them but would go elsewhere preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every sickness and disease (Matthew 9:35).

They saw this as an outrage and they were outraged at this local boy, this son of Joseph. What Jesus said about Elijah and Elisha was true of course but these hardened Jews could not accept anyone associating with Gentiles in any way. They thought Jesus was a pretty good preacher but on reflection considered him a young upstart and rebel. When they heard him say no prophet was accepted in his own country, and then suggest he would go to the Gentiles, they were furious.

When they heard these things they were filled with wrath (4:28). They flew into a jealous rage. They raged against this fellow who dared speak against their piety and their traditions.

It was not pagan Gentiles but religious Jews who spoke most vehemently and acted violently against Jesus. On another occasion Jews who were actually following Jesus became offended when he said 'if the Son shall make you free you shall be free indeed (John 8:36). They were offended at being told they were ever in bondage to sin. They had always been children of Abraham. In the end they took up stones to kill Jesus but he went through the midst of them and escaped (John 8:59). His hour had not yet come.

The people in his home town rose up against Jesus and threw him out of the synagogue and out of the town. Nazareth was built on a plateau in the hills of Galilee. They grabbed Jesus and took him to the cliff on the edge of town with the intention of throwing him to his death. But *passing through the midst of them he went on his way* (4:30). They had no power over the Son of God. God vindicated his Son in their midst.

Men whose piety is questioned, and whose traditions are threatened, often react most vigorously. In the history of the church they have even acted violently towards those who speak against them. Some of the Reformers died at the hands of church leaders.

Jesus came to his own, and his own did not receive him (John 1:11). When Jesus comes again will he approve of our piety and traditions? Will we receive him if he does not? Let us be sure that it is Jesus we are following and not our traditions. Let us be sure that it is Jesus we are depending on for salvation and not our own piety and good works.

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