

FOLLOWING JESUS - SOME PRAISED, SOME REJECTED, SOME FOLLOWED

Sometimes the best thing you can do for yourself is to stop focusing on yourself.

- The external focus can bring balance, reminder of blessings, and even peace.
- Especially when that external focus is on something good.
- And there's nothing as good as, as important as, as critical to both your earthly and eternal life as Jesus.
- Focus first on Jesus. Jesus will help you work out the rest from there.

Today we are focusing on Jesus when he was at the very beginning of his public ministry.

We're in Luke chapter 4. Jesus returns to his hometown, and it doesn't go well.

- Jesus began his public ministry in Galilee, the north part of Israel. Jerusalem is in the south.
- Luke 3:23 says Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry.
- This new young rabbi, Jesus, amazed people. Verse 15 says that "everyone praised him."
- There was something about Jesus, a Spirit, that attracted people to him.

It's in this spirit of early excitement that Jesus visits his hometown of Nazareth. Luke tells it:

- *When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom.*
- *He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.*
- *He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me..." [Luke reports these as Jesus' first recorded words of public teaching.]*

Picture the Synagogue service.

- Jesus, as the honored guest was invited to read the Scriptures.
- The Hassan, or worship assistant, hands Jesus the scroll, not a book but a scroll.
- Notice how it says Jesus "unrolled the scroll and found the place."
- Jesus reads standing up as it was customary to read standing up.
- Jesus sits down to teach as it was customary for Rabbis to sit down when teaching.

Jesus reads from Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

This is a description of humanity's spiritual condition - poverty, captivity, blindness, broken-heartedness, and captivity to sin in this fallen world.

- But it also has earthly outcomes as it is a vision for what God's kingdom on earth is supposed to look like.
- In this way, these are also socially revolutionary words, upsetting to status quo.

These are already ancient words by Jesus' time, and Jesus stuns the crowd by saying, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

- Only the long-awaited Messiah could bring the fulfillment of these ancient words.
- I am the fulfillment of this promise from God. In other words, I am the Messiah!

The crowd seems to have gone through a series of emotional reactions to Jesus.

- Jesus acknowledges it's difficult for those who knew someone as a child to give that same person full trust as an authority, especially as a religious authority, when they are grown.
- At first, they were all full of praise of him as their hometown boy, like one of their own who was going to put Nazareth on the map.
- But next it seems like they felt they deserved some special favoritism from him. "Hey, do for us one of those amazing miracle tricks we've been hearing you've been doing in other places, a really special one even better than what the others got. After all, it's us."

This attitude of a people seeming to think they deserved special treatment from God and everyone else on the basis of their social and inherited privilege was something that really set Jesus off. In surprisingly blunt words, he rebukes them.

- You are not special just because of your heritage.
- God and God's blessing are not only for you and your people.
- Jesus reminded them of the Bible stories of miracles of rescue and healing done for outsiders, for Gentiles instead for those who presumed they deserved them more.

The people went into a rage.

- Jesus had stomped upon their cultural, religious, and political pride.
- They became so violently angry it appears by their actions that they were going to kill Jesus by stoning him to death. It says they were going to throw him down from a cliff. This is how stoning people to death often began. The victim was thrown off a height. The rocks and boulders were dropped from above with bone breaking and killing force.

But at the last minute, Jesus' power asserts itself, and he takes control. It's like Jesus suddenly freezes the mob with his eyes and walks right through the group, leaving them behind. **It's never a good thing to be left behind by Jesus because you rejected him.**

The story began with people praising Jesus, yet praise alone, if without faith, doesn't save. Simply having a good opinion about Jesus is not enough.

- How about you, do you accept that Jesus is the messiah, the Lord, or not?
- That's the question that matters.
- Jesus is not looking for likes or fans; Jesus is looking for disciples and followers.
- There's a world of difference between the two.
- There's also a heavenly world of difference between the two.

Jesus is who you need, Jesus as your Lord. That self of yours you are so concerned about, the first thing it needs, before anything else, is Jesus.

Amen.