

13. Jesus Began His Ministry in Nazareth

In our last topic, we saw that we want to equip our physical and spiritual children so that they know how to have victory over the temptations that Satan uses to try to get them to sin. We saw that Satan uses three things to tempt people: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Eve had been tempted in each of these three areas and had chosen to sin. In contrast, Jesus defeated Satan in each of these three areas. The Lord is also able to give us His strength to defeat Satan when he tempts us. In our topic today, we are going to see the public ministry of Jesus in His home town of Nazareth.

Luke 4:14-16 says, “Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region. And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. 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.” Satan had left Jesus after he failed to get Jesus to sin. Then, Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee. Jesus wants us to serve Him in this same power instead of trying to serve Him in our own strength. That is why He told the disciples in Luke 24:49, “Behold, I send the Promise of My Father upon you; but tarry in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with power from on high.”

We see that news about Jesus began to spread throughout the entire region of Galilee. The people began talking about Jesus because of His teaching in their synagogues. The teaching of Jesus was different than the teaching of their scribes. Matthew 7:28-29 tells us why the people were talking about His teaching. Those verses say, “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” The teachers of the law gave the interpretations of earlier teachers. In contrast, Christ explained the Word of God and taught the people how to apply the Word of God to their lives.

As Jesus traveled to various synagogues explaining the Word of God, he came to the town of Nazareth where he had been raised from childhood. In His own town, Jesus did what He usually did. On the Sabbath, He went to the synagogue. It was the custom of Jesus to regularly read from the Old Testament in the synagogue. In fact, reading the Old Testament was the custom of all of the teenage boys and adult men in each synagogue. Each Sabbath, there would be seven to nine readings from the Old Testament. Each week, several of the teenage boys and men would take their turn reading the Scripture.

Luke 4:17-22 says, “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: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ 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. And He began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ 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?’” The person in charge handed Jesus a copy of the scroll of Isaiah.

Although they did not have chapters and verses as we do today, Jesus had read that scroll so often that He knew right where to turn to find what He wanted to read.

The part that Jesus read is the verses that are now Isaiah 61 one and the first half of two. Isaiah 61:1-2 say, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, Because the Lord has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, And the day of vengeance of our God; To comfort all who mourn...” Jesus came in the power of the Spirit so the Spirit Himself was the anointing. Notice that Jesus read all except the last part of verse two. Jesus had come to fulfill the part that He read. The phrase, “the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn,” refers to the second coming of Jesus when He will come to judge the nations. Jesus did not read that part because that part is still future. He only read the part that He fulfilled in His first coming. Everyone knew that Jesus had stopped in the middle of the sentence and that was why everyone immediately looked at Him.

The part that Jesus said was fulfilled described exactly the ministry of Jesus at His first coming. Jesus came to preach the good news of the salvation to the poor. In Matthew 5:3, Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus came to preach salvation to all people and those who humbled themselves and became poor in spirit and accepted that message. Jesus also came to bind up the brokenhearted. The word translated “heal” means *to cure or to make whole*. “Brokenhearted” means *to be broken in pieces*. Proverbs 15:13 says, “A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance, but by sorrow of the heart the spirit is broken.” Jesus came to make whole those who have been broken in spirit.

Jesus came “to preach deliverance to the captives” (KJV). “Deliverance” means *release from bondage, forgiveness or pardon*. Hebrews 9:22 says, “And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.” In this verse, the word is translated “remission”. In fact, this word is used seventeen times in the New Testament and it is always translated “remission” or “forgiveness” except in this verse. In this verse, it is translated “deliverance” here and “liberty” later in the verse.

Jesus came to give recovery of sight to the blind. Jesus said in Matthew 15:14, “Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.” This verse shows that Christ talked about spiritual blindness as well as physical blindness. Christ gave sight to some who were physically blind but he also gave spiritual sight to many who were spiritually blind. The passage said that Jesus came to set at liberty those who are bruised. “Liberty” is the word that was translated “captives” in the previous paragraph. The word translated “bruised” means *to break or shatter*. Hebrews 2:15 says, “And release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Jesus came to set people free from the bondage of sin.

He also came to preach “the acceptable year of the Lord”. The acceptable year is the time when the Messiah would come to show God’s favor to the people of the earth. Jesus had been standing to read the Scripture. Then, He sat down to begin to teach them as that was the normal custom in

a Jewish synagogue. Jesus told those in the synagogue that the passage He had just read was fulfilled in their hearing. The Jews there that day understood that Jesus had just said that He was the Messiah by that statement. Their immediate reaction was, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” This is actually a statement of rejection similar to “Who does he think he is?”

Luke 4:23-30 says, “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.”’ Then He said, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country. 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; but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, *in the region* of Sidon, to a woman *who was* a widow. And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.’ So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 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. Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.” The Jews in Nazareth had heard about the miracles that Jesus had done in Capernaum. Now, they told Him to heal Himself.

This was another statement of rejection. Jesus said that a prophet is not accepted in his own country by the people who know him. By this saying, Jesus was telling them that they were rejecting Him. Then, Christ mentioned two Old Testament miracles of healing. God had used Elijah to provide for a widow in Zarephath of Sidon during a famine. Then, God had used Elisha to heal Naaman the Syrian of leprosy. Both of these people were Gentiles. These two statements really stirred up the anger of the people of Nazareth because the two statements showed how the Jews had rejected God in the past.

The people in the synagogue were filled with anger at Jesus. In fact, they were so angry that they were ready to kill Him. In addition to saying that He was the Messiah, by this statement Jesus also said that the Gentiles had received grace through the prophets of God when the Jews rejected the prophets. The city of Nazareth was built on a hill. There was a cliff on one side of the city. The Jews were so angry that they tried to throw Jesus off the cliff. They were ready to kill them in their anger.

We read that Jesus passed through the midst of them. This means that the fact that Jesus escaped was a miracle performed by God to keep them from killing Jesus. Here, we see the rejection of Jesus by the people of His own home town. We will see many others also reject Jesus. However, it was not His time to die and so God performed a miracle so He could leave Nazareth. We want to help our physical and spiritual children understand that this was a very strong statement of the fact that Jesus is the Messiah that fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. We also want them to understand that Jesus would die at His set time and not at the time of those who rejected Him. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children to understand that Jesus is the Messiah.