

LUKE 4:16-30 THE NAZERENE MANDATE

Jesus returns to his hometown of around 1500 people and goes to the Synagogue. Every town had a synagogue. Seven people would be called up to read Scripture, which would be translated, from Hebrew into Aramaic. Then the president of the synagogue would invite someone to speak. Here was the small town lad, who made good on the national stage. People would have flocked to see the hometown boy. They are amazed at his teaching. However, by the end of his time in his hometown, they are about to execute him. He has made them so angry; they as a mob take him to the top of a cliff and threatened to throw him off. What did Jesus say that they would want to do that.

Jesus message meant they had to face acknowledge their own poverty

Jesus was claiming to be the long awaited Messiah. In addition, he said his mission was to the poor, blind, oppressed, downtrodden probably a summary of Is 58, 60 these words used were both literal and figurative. He literally came for those who were economically poor, the blind and the oppressed. However, wider i.e. those were spiritually poor, weighed down by life and suffering spiritually and emotionally. Some people in Israel identified with this. They had lost hope. They felt marginalized by the religious system. They felt they were not good enough. They had suffered under the Romans. However, other people bristled at this. The Messiah was to set them free from the Roman oppression and make their nation proud again. And if Jesus was about something else, they were not interested. In fact, he was a false messiah.

Jesus message meant they had to realize its scope

The Jews considered themselves God's people, who because of their birth, were favoured by God. They hated the Gentiles and considered them scum. Jesus reminds them of two stories from their history when the spiritual state of the nation was at its lowest.

First was when Ahab and Jezebel were ruling. They were cruel, corrupt and lead the Israelites to worship Baal, the storm God. Those in positions of power gave their support, while authentic believers said nothing. Elijah the prophet stood alone against Ahab, Jezebel and the Baal priests. To show that Baal was of no power, God sent a 3-year drought. God sent Elijah to a Gentile woman in Sidon, who had almost run out of food. God promised her that she and Elijah would have enough flour and oil to survive the drought. She

believed and God provided. God did not provide for those in Israel. Elijah followed Elijah, and a Gentile commander called Naaman was healed of leprosy, yet many in Israel got no healing.

What Jesus was saying was actually God has always been concerned for more than just the Jews. Maybe the Gentiles were more open to believing and receiving. What Jesus was illustrating was that his message was not just for the Jews, but actually anyone who had faith. Jesus hometown got angry because Jesus said he had come for those outside the synagogue for people that they despised.

Jesus message meant transformative action.

Is 58. God said. I am sick of your worship and songs I want you to take action. Look after the poor. Feed the hungry. Then I will pour out my blessing and my spirit upon you as a nation. Israel had not done this. They had not understood God's heart for justice and mercy. They were running great religious meetings, and God said he considered it worthless. By quoting these passages and saying this was his mission he was also saying. You are not doing this. This message is about action. It is boots on the ground.

Jesus is saying my mission is about compassion and healing where there is pain. My mission is about reaching those who have lost hope. My mission is about ensuring justice. This is seen by many as a call to social action. Reality is that how Jesus treated the sick, and women and children, and lepers and beggars and prostitutes showed that every life has dignity. It set the foundation for schools, and hospitals and charities, and the empowered of women. This agenda has caused many to go to the hell holes of the world the absolute worst places to bring hope.

Therefore, Jesus message challenged their self-identity their purpose and their actions. You threaten someone's self-identity and purpose and actions and you will get a hostile reaction.

Jesus stopped his reading half way through a verse. He stopped and did not continue about God's judgement. There is a day of judgement. That is God's issue, not ours. We are in a season of grace. We have this incredible good news of grace. It is not for us to preach judgement to the world but hope, life, purpose,



meaning, healing, wholeness God wants to bring his kingdom to earth.

How do we react to the Jesus message?

That might seem a silly question. Well I am in church aren't I? I have been a Christian for years Yet I think how we react is a crucial question. The first thing we have to clarify is what is the gospel. Most Christians if asked would say. Well the good news is that Jesus came to earth to die for our sins, so that whoever believes in him shall not die but have eternal life.

There is one problem. Jesus went around preaching the gospel, yet he was still alive, and there was no cross yet. So what was Jesus preaching? He preached that people could become part of the kingdom and God's radical restoration plan for this world.

How do we react to this gospel? Because the message has not changed. The gospel is not relevant to us unless we recognized our own poverty and brokenness. Unless there is a self-awareness of our spiritual poverty, our own brokenness, then Jesus message is not that relevant. I think this is a challenge for us as a mainly middle class church. WE like being self-sufficient. We put on a mask that we have it together. Southern man never admit weakness. So why do we need God's grace, and healing. My life is OK. I have seen many people at church bristle at the word brokenness. I am not broken. I have it together. Yet the reality is that they are blind to their own stuff. Someone bought a prophetic word to the elders the other day. It was around pride. They sensed that God was saying he is sick of our whitewashed hearts. The hearts that look good on the outside but inside are not.

Second challenge as a middle class church is where should we be ministering. Jesus said this is my ministry: to the poor, down-trodden, blind, oppressed. Are we focussing our ministry where there is real need, real pain, Into the messy areas of our city where there is poverty and oppression. Are we going to focus ministry into these areas. Where people are most open to Jesus are those who are struggling in some way.

Then we have to ask how do we react to the scope of message.

We say, well we are not racist. WE know God loves everyone from all nations. How could the Jews be so blind? However, we all have blind spots. I have seen people get angry when you try to suggest that we

should focus more on those who are outside the church. Church is for Christians they say. We need fed and encouraged and built up. We do not want to focus on those outside the church I think the divide for us is not racial but it is the same issue. We are in, God loves us. Others are out.

Why did the older brother get so angry in the story of the prodigal son? The key is Luke 12:1, which tells the reason for the story. Why are you giving all this attention to this guy, who just blew all your money. He is not coming to the party. The Father goes out and talks to him. What happens. We don't know. It is left hanging.

The older brother is us. Most of us have grown up in the church family. But we struggle to accept the Father pouring out his love on those who are not from such a background. But the scope of God's plan is for the good news to come to those who are different from ourselves The acid test is when we begin to direct resources and emphasis in this direction. We object: But we want a pastor, we want deeper Bible study the church is for us.

How do we react to the personal cost of the message?

I wonder if too often we have seen the gospel as our ticket for the future and we have failed to see that Jesus message means following Jesus on Monday and Tuesday and even Saturday. . If this is Jesus mission then in some way this has to become our mission. This is not a Sunday thing. This involves everything. It is radical.

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REFLECTION + DISCUSSION

Has our gospel message been too small ie personal salvation to heaven rather than transformation of the whole of society?

Many see no need for Christ in their lives, because they don't see their own brokenness. Discuss this. Without the promise of heaven would you follow Jesus?

Do you think this message might make some Christians angry? What is your reaction?

What can we do to make the Nazarene mandate part of our lives. How do we live this out in practical ways?



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