

*January 24, 2016*

*Luke 4:16-30: **“What Will You Do With Jesus?”***

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

The Old Testament reading for today was from the book of Nehemiah - probably not a book we read too often. He was one of the leaders of the Jewish people returning from their exile in Babylon. They had been there for 70 long years, living among strange people in a strange land with a strange culture, strange language, strange food, and strange gods. The Temple and Jerusalem had been looted and then destroyed. The exile was a warning of hell. God disciplined the people in order to turn them back to him and live.

And so, after the 70 years are completed, God brings His people back. They rebuild Jerusalem and its walls and the Temple. Furthermore, they needed to learn again who they were as God's people. The first five books of the Bible were read to them. Yes, they actually stayed and listened from early morning until midday. What they heard both stunned and delighted them. They answered, "Amen! Let it be so!" and they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

Now, what was it that they heard that caused such a response? They heard the truth! Their spiritual hunger and thirst was being filled. They heard of how God had specially created them. In Babylon it was entirely different - full of lies and uncertainty. Man was insignificant and merely a pawn among the Babylonian gods. In our culture, we are taught that evolution made everything. "It's all an accident. There is nothing but pure accident." Indeed! Full of lies and uncertainty. We crave the truth!

When the law was read, the people heard of sin, the rebellion of mankind, they heard how the promise of a Savior was passed down from generation to generation. They heard of how God brought his people up out of their slavery and captivity in Egypt and taught them the covenant so they would keep their eyes fixed on the coming Savior. They came to understand that the Lord had a glorious destination for them. In Babylon, there was no salvation except for doing good and hopefully making the gods happy. There was no destination except to remain in the exile. Our culture is just as destitute. Salvation is really in what you have and what you do. Life is built on what you make of it and how you extend it, and whatever is after that is pretty much a blind leap into the darkness. Hopelessness!

In the day of Nehemiah, when the Jewish people heard the first five books of the Bible being read, they were confronted with a question that all of us are confronted with when reading God's holy word: **What Will You Do With [the Savior] Jesus?** And on that day they cried out in sincere love and devotion.

Like the reading of the first five books of the Bible in our Old Testament lesson, Jesus goes back to his hometown church and stands up to read the Scriptures. He had good news for the people that should both stun and delight them. So he opens up the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and reads these words: "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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Luke goes on to record in verses 21-22: "And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them,

‘Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’” Now, when you hear these words of Jesus you have to understand what he was saying to them. These words of Isaiah are about the coming of the Savior. To say that they were fulfilled was to point to the fact that everything that was said in the first five books of the Bible was now present among them - right before their very eyes. Everything that they had been waiting for had arrived. So the words are truly gracious words. Not only what was being read in the book of Isaiah, but all Scripture was now being fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth! Again the question was this: **What will they do with [the Savior] Jesus?**

But, the people of Nazareth did not quite react the same way as the people in Nehemiah’s day. Instead of crying out “Amen! Let it be so!” and bowing their heads and worshiping him with their faces to the ground, they pose this very interesting question: “Is this not Joseph’s son?” And by the end of the account, the people of Nazareth are so furious with Jesus that they are going to kill him. In one moment they speak well of him . . . and the next they are seeking to destroy him. Why?

There are two things going on in this text. To begin with, they did *not* marvel at his words because they felt the depth and hopelessness of their spiritual poverty due to sin and their need for forgiveness. They did *not* initially speak well of him because they deeply felt their wounds of sin and sought after true healing. They did *not* see themselves as captives of the power of death, blind without God and hoping to be free from the chains of sin and death. Rather, they wanted goodies. They were *not* seeking an exodus from sin, death, and the devil, but were looking for the miracles and healing that would change their lives down here and give them heaven on earth.

It is then that they realize . . . “Hey, Isn’t this Joseph’s son? How is he going to be able to do all these wonderful things? Why isn’t he getting to the good stuff and doing here what he has done in other places?” This is why Jesus responds to them by saying, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” It is written in Matthew 16:4, “an evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign.”

This tells us the most unfortunate truth about those in Nazareth. They did not believe that they needed to be saved from sin, death, and hell. This is the second thing going on in the text. Whatever delight they had in Jesus in the very beginning, quickly turns to wrath and rage when Jesus tells them that he is not there to make heaven on earth. So, instead of worshiping him and acknowledging who he is and all his good works, they reject his words and want to kill him. “Throw him down the cliff, that ungrateful, lousy, no good excuse for a son of Mary and Joseph.” And again, we are faced with the question: **What Will You Do With [the Savior] Jesus?**

The Jewish people at the time of Nehemiah embraced him in his word. They did not wish to destroy all that had been written because they acknowledge their need for a Savior from sin and death. On the other hand, the people in Nazareth did not see their sin and so hated Jesus for his word. They liked the idea of a Savior who could do stuff for them, but the notion of Savior who would save them from their sins and heal them from their sinful desires was something outside their box. **What Will We Do With Jesus?**

It is a very sad verse when we read in our Gospel lesson: "And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away (Luke 4:29-30)." Are we like the people of Nazareth? Do we look to God to give us goodies for this short time (and maybe get angry when he doesn't give us what we want), or do we look for him to lead us to something better? Or, are we like the people in Nehemiah's day? They heard of sin and death, and heard about the sacrifice of the Savior who would come and deliver them from sin and death, and they said "Amen! Let it be so!"

**What Will You Do With Jesus?** What will you do with the one who says that you are lost and need to be found? What will you do with the one who promises a future instead of a glorious down here? What will you do with the one who came in order that we might rejoice in his faithfulness and goodness to us in our departure from this sinful life down here?

Our age and every age needs Christ to be the one who disturbs people with a disturbing message. If he does not disturb us - wake us up and shake us to our foundation, opening up our ears, and giving us sight to see the truth, then we will never be ready for the true meaning of him as Savior. Only with an understanding of sin and death is it wonderful to hear that he lived a perfect life and went to the cross to save us from ourselves, to deliver us from our captivity to sin, death, and hell, to give us sight that we might see the wonders of his love. But if we refuse him and love ourselves and sin, he will go away, just as he went away from the people of Nazareth. What a horrible verdict.

But, for us this morning, I hope and pray that he will not pass through our midst and go away from us. Instead, I hope and pray that we have seen the reality of sin and our need for salvation, and that he has fixed our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. I pray better things for all of us - that today would be like the days of Nehemiah, that we would embrace his word, and that each one of us would say "Amen! Let it be so!" and bow our heads and worship the Lord with our faces to the ground.

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott