

Listening To Jesus Conference

Session 2 - Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Our calling is to give Jesus to people

Our calling is to release the Kingdom of God into people's lives and communities; it is to give Jesus to them so that they can respond to Jesus' invitation:

Matt 11:28-30 "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Is this how you see your mission?

We need to "camp" in the Gospels and feed on Jesus

I cannot listen for you, nor can I make you listen, but I can invite you to sit at Jesus feet with me. If I visit your home you find a seat for me to sit in whilst we talk. I can give you a chair to sit in at Jesus feet. As a shepherd I cannot put the grass in your mouth and make you eat, but I can take you to where the grass is green and invite you to eat. When you find good pasture, you want to stay there and enjoy it. I call this "camping in the scripture". I pitch my tent and stay there, usually for at least a week or two, and often much longer.

So here now is the pasture I want to invite you to camp in with me.

A clash between Kingdom and native culture

Luke 4:14-30.

This is a story of Jesus loving the people he loves most – those He grew up with. But it is a very surprising story. This is dangerous Jesus!

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.

There are only two people mentioned by name in this story. One is Jesus, the other is His father, Joseph. I want you to imagine you are Joseph. And to help you get into character I'm going to do a little imagining. So close your eyes and put yourself into the story.

Everything looks nice, everyone is happy

Everyone has come early today to try and get a seat. Look around you. Here are all your friends and family, that you have grown up with and know intimately. This is your synagogue, which your parents helped to build when you were a child. You helped carry the water and mould the mud bricks. You remember the day when the community held the first synagogue service here. You feel secure and at home.

Today there is much excitement because in recent weeks, your first son Jesus has become the talk of the town and all the towns round about. He has become a powerful and popular preacher in the district. He is coming home today and everyone wants to hear all His stories. The Rabbi said it wouldn't be appropriate for Jesus to talk about Himself in the service, so He is just reading the lesson. But we are all staying afterwards to hear His stories.

As the familiar service gets underway your mind wanders back to the last time you saw Jesus, 12 Sabbaths ago. That Friday afternoon as you were clearing up the workshop in preparation for the Sabbath, Jesus cleaned his tools and put them away, then he turned to you, looked you in the eyes and said, "Father. It is finished." You feel again the shiver that went down your spine at these words. You asked Jesus what He meant. He said, "I have completed the work I have to do for you. I must now go and do my *heavenly* Father's work." He left that afternoon for Jerusalem and you haven't seen Him since. Today He has come home. Your attention comes back as Jesus is asked to read.

They all love the reading

He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

Everyone looks at you, and your heart brims with pride at how one of your sons has become such a renowned and popular preacher. You can't wait for the service to end so you can hear Jesus tell of all the healings that you have heard about.

There are smiles on everyone's faces and the service is about to move onto the prayers and the final blessing. But we never get to the prayers. The service ends in utter chaos – worse than that, it ends in a riot! Just as the Rabbi is about to start the prayers, Jesus speaks again.

Jesus deliberately provokes them

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.' Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian."

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

You can't move with shock. You are the only one left sitting in the synagogue, but you see it all through the open door. You are shocked and shaken. You are confused and dismayed. You can hardly believe what has just happened.

Jesus walks away

The last thing you see is Jesus walking away from the village. And now here you are; alone, wondering.

Questions

What did Joseph think?

Staying in character as Joseph, what is your reaction to this incident?

What other characters are there that we could imagine being? - an angry member of the congregation, the leading Rabbi, an uncomprehending child, one of Jesus' disciples, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, God the Father, a passer-by, a sparrow! And finally, a 21st century reader.

What do you think?

As a 21st century reader what are your immediate reactions / thoughts / questions about this?

- Why did Jesus provoke them?
- Why did they react so strongly?
- Why did Jesus walk away?

No prophet is accepted in his hometown

Let's try to answer some of these questions by thinking about what Jesus said after the people said "Isn't this Joseph's son?" (v22):

Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'

Although outwardly the entire congregation are enthusiastic about what Jesus said, in their hearts, Jesus knows they are sceptical about the reports they have been hearing from nearby Capernaum. The reason for this is indicated by the next thing Jesus says:

Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown."

What is a prophet? – Someone whom God has called to bring God's specific revelation to others.

What does it mean to "accept" a prophet (what kind of response is God looking for?) – Give special consideration to what they have to say; to listen carefully in the expectation that God wants to say something important to you.

Why is a prophet not accepted in his hometown? The congregation see Jesus as a familiar member of their community – someone they grew up with. They do not think of him as anyone special. They are

used to discussing ideas as all equally valid, from which they hope to come to some common agreement.

Why was this not a problem at Capernaum?

Can the Gospel stories become too familiar to impact us?

Do you think we can become so familiar with the Gospel stories that we miss what Jesus wants to say to us?