

Bi132 The Gospels

Lesson Bi132-15 Rejection at Nazareth

As servants of Christ, we must remember that not all people will receive us or our message. The same was true in the days when Jesus was on earth. At first people adored him because he healed their sick and performed many miracles. However, when he confronted the people in his hometown with his true identity as the anointed One of God, they rejected him completely. They would be the first of many Jewish people to refuse their Messiah.

Jesus left the village of the Samaritan woman and went on to Galilee. News about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in the synagogues, and everyone praised him. Then he went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. On the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. The scriptures of the Old Testament were handwritten on scrolls and kept in a special case in the synagogue. When he stood up to read that day, the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he read 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 release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Isa 61:1-2).

Then Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. It was customary to stand while reading scripture, but to sit while teaching. Everyone in the synagogue was watching him when he said, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). The portion he read from Isaiah referred first of all to the year of Jubilee, every fiftieth year, when slaves were freed and debts canceled. The term ‘year of the Lord’s favor,’ however, was interpreted to refer also to the Messianic age to come—the period when salvation would be proclaimed through the Messiah’s ministry of preaching, deliverance, and healing.

The Jews were confused, not accepting who Jesus was claiming to be. They rejected him because he claimed to be the Messiah, but he did not act or speak like the Messiah they had been expecting. They could not believe God would send a young teacher, which they knew, to be their Savior. Yet, they were amazed at the kind words he spoke. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

Jesus said to them, “I know what you are thinking, ‘If you are a prophet, do some miracles here like we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” The people of Nazareth refused to believe Jesus’ teaching unless he proved his identity by doing miracles in front of them, like he had done elsewhere. Jesus could see this doubt and rejection in their hearts.

“I tell you the truth,” he continued, “No prophet is accepted in his hometown. As an example, I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when there was no rain for over three years and a great famine in the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in the region of Sidon, outside of Israel. 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” (Luke 4:24-27).

All the people in the synagogue were furious and turned against Jesus because of his condemnation of Israel and favorable attitude toward Gentiles. The point of Jesus' teaching was that when Israel rejected God's messengers Elijah and Elisha, he sent them to the Gentiles. So it would be again if the Jews refused to accept Jesus. The angry Jews got up and drove him out of the town. They took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he somehow walked right through the crowd and went on his way. He then returned to Capernaum.

Jesus tells the people of Nazareth that these verses from Isaiah, which speak of the coming Messiah, are fulfilled in him. He will set people free from their bondage to sin and its consequences. He also informs them that this good news is not just for the Jews, but for all peoples. He does this with two stories they knew well. The first was about the non-Jewish widow Elijah provided for during a famine. The second concerned the non-Jewish Syrian military official who was cleansed of leprosy in the time of Elisha. Both stories illustrate that God responds to people of faith, no matter what their nationality or background. The Jews understood clearly what Jesus was saying, but were unwilling to accept that what he said was true.

This story is **important** because it reminds us that Jesus was rejected by his own people even though he offered them freedom from sin, through faith in their promised Messiah. We may be rejected in the same way when we proclaim that only Jesus can bring pardon and forgiveness to all peoples.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus was rejected by his own people because he told them the truth about himself and revealed to them their own spiritually blind condition.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What prophet did Jesus read from when he went to the synagogue in Nazareth?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said "He read from the words of Isaiah," you are correct.
2. What did the people of Nazareth want?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said "Jesus said, 'the people wanted Jesus to do some miracles to prove who he was,'" you are correct.
3. What was the response of the people in Nazareth when he told the two stories about non-Jews whom God provided for long ago?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said, "They dragged Jesus out of the town and took him to the brow of the hill, intending to throw him off the cliff," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to memorize this story after listening to it several times, so that you can tell it to someone else. Then find a fellow believer and discuss the signs and wonders that Jesus did in his ministry. Does God use such miracles today, to convince people of their need for a Savior? Do people who receive healing always repent of their sins as well, or do some of them just walk away? How does this story about the condition of people's heart and their motives, explain why God does miracles in some situations and not in others? Since we cannot see people's hearts, it is our responsibility to pray to God in faith and leave the answer and its timing with him. This is true whether ministry is in our hometown or some other place.