

Identifying the King Mark 6: 1-7, Luke 4: 16-27

Overview

Having ministered around the Sea of Galilee in different towns and villages, performing all kinds of miraculous works, Jesus returns to His hometown Nazareth. One might expect that Jesus would return to a heroes welcome and have the freedom to work God's power into many lives, but tragically that was far from the reality. Teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, before a great crowd of Jews we are confronted by two more 'objections' to faith in Jesus; 1) He was an 'ordinary' bloke and 2) He was offensive!

Luke gives us a fuller account of this moment.

1) He is Ordinary

The crowd in the synagogue were impressed by Jesus; even after he had quoted from Isaiah 61, claiming himself to be the fulfilment of the prophecy and thus in affect identifying himself as the Messiah. We are told they 'spoke well of him' and yet they wanted more. Jesus discerned their thoughts and said in verse 23 that they wanted miracles from him, they wanted to see him do the kind of stuff he did in Capernaum. Without these displays of power Jesus appeared 'ordinary' to them and unremarkable. Paul in 1st Corinthians 1: 21-24 challenged the idea that more is needed than Jesus and His gospel to bring transformation. The power for change resides in the gospel of Christ and Him crucified, this is a message we are at risk of losing confidence in, concluding like the crowd in the synagogue that miracles and displays of power are required to convince people that Jesus is the Christ. Churches and preaching that emphasise anything other than this gospel are therefore likely to be false and we should be wary of such a message.

2) He is Offensive

It is only once Jesus proceeds into his 'sermon' that a great reaction occurs in the synagogue. Read out verses 25-27 and ask yourself what is so shocking about these statements.

The Jews had an expectation or assumption of God's blessing on account of their racial history and heritage, hence why they expected Jesus to 'perform' for them. Jesus taught here about grace, a doctrine that is both glorious and offensive. He highlighted that it was a Gentile (non Jewish) widow to whom God sent Elijah with miraculous provision despite the existence of many starving Jewish widows. He also identifies Naaman who was a very wealthy Syrian general suffering from leprosy at a time when many Israelites were plagued with the disease. Naaman came to the prophet Elisha with great treasure seeking to 'buy' a cure and was told to wash in the river Jordan, something that angered him greatly as his 'gift' was not considered necessary for the healing but a seemingly silly act of washing was. Jesus highlighted these incidents to show that the grace of God comes not on account of a person's heritage or wealth but as a free gift to those who are spiritually poor. This caused great anger in the synagogue as Jesus was telling this group that they needed God to gift them their spiritual healing, something they didn't deserve and could not earn.

3) Jesus is all you need

Jesus came with Good News for the poor. Simply put, His invitation was for sinners to accept His life and death as their own, not relying upon self but trusting in Him for their acceptance before God. As Christians we must be confident in the power of this gospel to see lives transformed, we have no other message besides Christ and Him crucified.

Questions

Why did the people of Nazareth struggle to see Jesus for who he really was? What are some of the reasons why people reject Jesus today?

In what ways can we, as Christians be tempted to alter our gospel? Why is the cross so central to our message?

Why did Jesus offend the people in the synagogue so much? Why is God's gift of salvation so offensive to some and so wonderful to others?