

Response To Jesus

Turn with me this morning and follow along as I read these words from Luke chapter 4, beginning in verse 16.

¹⁶So He (the Lord Jesus) came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸ "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." ²⁰Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?"

²³ And he said to them, "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.'" ²⁴ And he said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.

²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.

²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away. (Luke 4:16-30)

There is a curious thin line of understanding and obedience that God has called us to follow as Christians as we pursue after knowledge about the Lord Jesus, this

Great Savior who has given His life to save us from our sins. And it's clear from these scriptures that God fully expects a response from us as we learn.

And though, just as with these people in this synagogue, we may not be able to fully comprehend His words. And even beyond that, we might not really like some of the things we learn about Him. But again, even so, a response from us is still required.

A point of doctrine that we have spoken about often is the matter of "man's free will", and how exactly our "free will" responses fit into the divinely orchestrated plans that God has arranged for us.

And here in this circumstance with the Lord Jesus, we find both the "free will of man" and the "divine foreordaining of God" fully at work within all that is taking place.

As we know from the words of John 6:44, no one comes to Jesus except that the Father draws them. And that being so, we know that these people were divinely drawn to this synagogue on this day. But then we also quickly find their "free will" responses coming to the surface, first approving, but then "rejecting" the Lord Jesus.

And yes, these people's responses were particularly strong, even violent. But while you or I or even most of the people we know in the churches of our day might not have as strong a response to the truths we learn about Christ, still, throughout the centuries since the Lord Jesus first walked this earth church members have been very opinionated and strong in their response to certain of the teachings within our churches.

Church congregations have split and whole denominations have been formed, with hard-fought intellectual battles being waged. And much of it has been about these matters I just mentioned, about "God's foreordaining" of the matters that come to pass and about "man's free will". And even I must confess that I barely understand enough about it to be able to preach its truth.

But with all of that being said, I am convinced that all that we will need to know is really right here within the words of this bible. And contrary to some of the arguments, the words in these scriptures support both sides of those arguments.

And folks, the words are clear! God absolutely foreordains whatsoever comes to pass, including the salvation by which we obtain eternal life. But yet, man must also exercise his will to "believe" and to "receive" that blessed Person of

the Son of God, and to receive the salvation and the sanctification that He brings with Him.

My own understanding comes from the bible teachers who explain it as being a form of “concurrency”, “concurrency”, that mysterious phenomena that I have spoken to you about on other occasions, that mysterious phenomena through which my “free will” is able to become the same as “God’s Will”.

And as regards my salvation, it is that mysterious phenomena in which God chooses me to be one of His own, while at the same time, I also seem to be making that choice of choosing to receive Him. But always with the absolute understanding that God is ever and always the “first cause” of all that takes place on the earth.

And no, I don’t really understand how all of this works out but, by faith, I know and accept that it is true because these scriptures declare it to be true.

So then, how do these thoughts fit into the scripture text that is before us today. How does a person’s seemingly “free will” belief fit into the providential will of God? It is this! As Jesus stepped forward into the ministry that God the Father sent Him to carry out, He knew that though He really did not need to prove Himself to any man, that there was still a sense in which it was necessary for each person to know exactly who He was in order for them to truly believe in Him.

We know from these scriptures that there were many people at that time who were looking forward to the coming of a Messiah. And so, with them it was probably easier for them to accept who Jesus was. But for most of the people, it seems that that would not be so.

Most of the people were comfortable with the religious system that they already had. They knew generally how to obey the laws of the church, much in the same way that many of our would-be Christians of today are comfortable with their acceptance and following of the general rules of Christianity. But it was with those “would-be” believers of Jesus’ day, that He would have the most difficulty.

As Jesus spoke these words that day,

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, Because He has anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight

to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹ To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” (Luke 4:18-19)

And then as He said,

“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:19)

Those words really were shocking to many of the people who were present there in the synagogue that day. Some, who were truly listening, knew exactly what Jesus was declaring about Himself, that He was saying that He really was the Messiah, the “Anointed One”, the One sent to save them from their sins, the true “Son of God”. And yes, some of them believed what He said. But others were not ready to accept it, and they questioned . . . “Who was He to be declaring that He was the Christ, the Messiah, the one being spoken about in this Book of Isaiah? After all, was not this man Joseph’s Son, the one that many of them had watched grow up before their eyes?

That kind of resistance would be the greatest challenge that Jesus would face as He stepped forward into His ministry, to convince these obstinate people that He truly was the Messiah that they had read about in the scriptures, the One who had come to seek and to save them from their sins.

To even say that something could be a “challenge” to the God who created the whole universe, does not seem to be a right use of the words, but in reality, it was, and it still is. It was a challenge because God Himself had placed those limitations upon Himself. He chose the way of men in order that he might truly win men to Himself.

And so, the people then, and we today, continually question, “Is Jesus really who He says He is?”

By God’s own design, it seems to come back to this matter of man’s “free will”. Somehow, in the counsels of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit concluded that for a person to truly love them, and for a person to truly surrender their lives to them, then that person’s love and their surrender would best come as an act of that person’s own will.

And I am also convinced that it has something to do with God’s own holiness and righteousness. For God to remain holy and righteous as He contends with the sins of men, He must give us some freedoms of choice in the responses we have to Him.

In other words, if you or I want to make the choice to turn our backs on Christ and to walk straight into the pit of hell, then somehow, within that mysterious concurrence of our "wills", God will "give us over" to do that.

We read about how God will do that in Romans chapter 1. In those words, as men and women choose to suppress the truths of God and instead to choose the lures of this world over the Beloved God who created us, it is said in those words that God "gives us over to our depraved desires", even to our eternal destruction.

But then, we also know that if we do turn from our evil ways and we surrender our lives to Christ and His great salvation, then in the same way, He will gladly save us. And in that way, it very much seems to be our personal choice to make!

Does such allowance of choices on God's part cause Him to give up His Sovereignty over us? No! God can still foreordain and predestine our eternal souls, and do even much, much more. It is all somehow within His power and within His plan.

And we don't have to know exactly why or how or with whom He will accomplish each of these things. We probably would not understand it even if He explained it to us. So, for that reason, it will always remain a mystery, and a matter of "faith".

But again, this matter of convincing men and women that He was the Christ, the Son of God who had come to save them from their sins, and then to convince them to willingly give their hearts to Him, that would turn out to be one of the greatest challenges facing Jesus.

And that is the message that God has for you and me today as we view Jesus' challenge with these people. Here, in these words, Jesus told these people exactly who He was, that He was the one sent from God to preach the gospel to the poor . . . to heal the brokenhearted . . . to proclaim liberty to the captives . . . and recovery of sight to the blind . . . to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and . . . to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Yes, again, some of those people wanted to believe Jesus. They were mesmerized by His powerful way of speaking. But then, it only took one rebuke, the account in the scriptures about Elijah being sent to the widow of Zarephath, and also, Elisha being sent to Naaman the Syrian, both of which were Gentiles.

Folks, that was very offensive to most of those people. They could not accept that God would choose to send His prophets to someone other than a Jew. And so, many of the same people who had just praised Him, then suddenly turned against Him, and wanted to kill Him.

Listen! Verse 28,

²⁸So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, ²⁹and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff. (Luke 4:28-29)

Challenges to our beliefs cause us to react and to do things that we might not have imagined ourselves doing. But let me say to you that these same kinds of challenges are all a part of the process that God has designed to “reach into” and to examine each of our faith.

Here, in this incident in the synagogue, we see a sudden change take place in the hearts of the people. With only a few words of rebuke, the people turned away and wanted to kill Jesus.

With you or me, it might be similar. With only a few uncomfortable words from a preacher or a fellow church member, we might decide not to come back to church anymore.

Usually though, our turning away from Jesus takes place more gradually. Most often, we just quietly “drift away” from our relationship with Christ. It might be as a result of a pandemic, as we have taking place right now. Or we might get distracted by things and activities and people who steal our time away from our reading of our bible, from praying, from going to Bible Studies, and eventually from going to church.

And that distraction is the opening that the world, the flesh and the devil are looking for. That is the opportunity that they use to cause us to once again lapse back into that great challenge that Jesus faced. We begin to question all over again, “Is Jesus really who He says He is?”

And folks, that really can happen with you and me. Satan is persistent and he is committed to stealing our souls away from Christ.

How can it take place with you and me personally? It might begin with just a quiet pondering that creeps into our thoughts. And if we leave those thoughts unattended for a while, they can eventually erupt into full-blown and powerful

doubt, asking, "Is this religion that I had once come to trust really real? Is Jesus Christ really God? Is He really a Savior, my Savior, sent from God the Father to save me?"

As much as you and I might not want those kinds of thoughts to keep coming up in our minds, they will, and you and I need to know how to deal with them.

Again, where do those thoughts come from? Most often, they come straight out of the pit of hell, the world, the flesh and the devil. And they have only one purpose and that is to confuse us and to turn us away from Christ.

As these scriptures tell us, the evil one has one desire, and that is "to steal, to kill and to destroy", each of us.

Thankfully though, even when the world, the flesh and the devil combine their efforts to hurt us and to turn us aside with their questions and doubts, God remains close at hand to be our defender and our helper. And if we are careful, to listen for and to hear His "still small voice", and to respond rightly to His help, then our questions can get settled quickly and rightly, and by their answers actually enable us to go on forward more encouraged than we ever were before.

Folks, you and I must be confident and take great pleasure in knowing that our God is faithful and trustworthy, and in knowing that He is far more powerful than the world, the flesh or the devil, and that as they try their hardest to do us harm, God is right there at work to turn their mischief right back into their face and to defeat their purposes.

But how do you and I keep and hold onto our confidence and our faith in the Lord in amidst of all of the trials and the battles that beset us? The answer is given to us clearly in these scriptures. We gain and we keep our faith by the hearing and receiving of God's word. Listen to these simple words of Romans 10:17.

¹⁷So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Romans 10:17)

We gain faith and we keep our faith by staying in constant contact with Christ by the reading and the hearing of His word.

I'm reminded of soldiers on the field of battle, caught up in the rage of gunfire and exploding artillery. If they are not careful, they can get confused and disoriented and distracted. The rule for survival and victory is to keep focused

on the directions given by the leader, to listen for the trumpet call and to follow the banner carrier.

That is the same truth that is being revealed to us in these words of scripture. You and I must keep constant contact with our leader and our guide, constantly focused on His trumpet call and constantly keeping our eyes on Him as our banner carrier. Hebrews 12:2,

²Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12:2)

How do we keep our eyes fixed on Him in amidst the daily battles of life? Again, we do that simply and practically, by setting aside time, on a daily basis, to read these scriptures and to pray. We do that sort of thing naturally when it comes to feeding our body with food. Why not do the same with our soul?

These words that we will read as we open up these scriptures are so much more powerful and so much more helpful and comforting than we could ever imagine.

Why is that so? Jesus told us the reason in John chapter 6, where He said

⁶³ . . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. (John 6:63)

These words of scripture actually have the very Spirit of God residing within them. And as we take them into our souls, they bring with them life, and answers that we never had before, comfort and peace for our times of trouble, guidance for the questions that beset us, no matter what those questions might be or from whence they might come.

So then, as Jesus steps forward into your and my heart, let's make His challenge easier. Let's you and me commit to opening up our hearts and minds to His Spirit. And let's begin by committing ourselves to a firm and unyielding plan of reading His word and of prayer every day, beginning today. Jesus said,

⁶³ . . . The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life. (John 6:63)

Let's Pray.