

INTRODUCTION

The longest part of Jesus' ministry was carried out in Galilee. Although this incident in Nazareth was not the first thing he did in Galilee it is written as an introduction to the rest.

THE OCCASION - SABBATH IN THE SYNAGOGUE

Jesus joined the rest of God's people. He is one of us and joins in our worship.

Keeping the Jewish Sabbath by worship and acts of mercy was part of his obedience to God's Law. That was part of his humiliation, and part of his work on our behalf.

The Sabbath and its worship were more than Mosaic ritual. From the earliest time humanity came before God "at the end of the days" (Genesis 4:3). It was a time to meet God, contemplate his work, and hope in his promises. It was a relief from the curse (Genesis 3:17-19; Exodus 20:8-11), and a time to await redemption (Genesis 3:15). Our Sabbath has taken on a new dimension, freed from the Mosaic Law and celebrating redemption in the resurrection of Jesus. Keeping the first day holy to the risen Christ is part of godliness.

Jesus took a leading part in their worship, declaring God's Word to the congregation. It was from the Scriptures, but it was also a message from heaven to them in a special way.

He spoke with unique authority. They recognised it even though they rejected him.

He still leads the worship of the Church, both in heaven as its representative, and on earth through his Word, his Spirit, and his servants. He declares God to us and gives him praise.

DESCRIPTION OF JESUS

Jesus took the passage he read (Isaiah 61:1-2) as a reference to himself.

He said that his presence was a fulfilment of that prophecy - he was the person they were waiting for. He was claiming to be the Christ. This was God at work.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me." He was not acting on his own initiative but was being led by God. His words were not his own but were the very words of God.

When he asserted himself it was because he came with God's authority and in order to honour God.

The rejection of Jesus and his teaching is therefore a rejection of God himself.

A further description of Jesus comes in the reaction of his hearers. "All spoke well of him and marvelled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth (verse 22).

Everything leads us to expect that they would welcome him and his teaching.

JESUS' WORK

The passage in Isaiah speaks about the Christ being sent to bring God's blessing to the needy. It is good news, and he brings good with him. It is "the poor" who benefit.

In practice Jesus blessed poor and rich alike, so the word "poor" may be a description of us all or it may refer to people who recognise their poverty as in "Blessed are the poor in spirit ..."

The fact of poverty in God's creation shows there has been a 'Fall'. The prophet's words include material poverty but refer to much more.

It includes humanity's relationship with God as well as the consequences of that.

Poverty implies being unable to pay what we owe. We owe God a life of truth and love, obeying him in gratitude and confidence. We have not rendered him his due nor are able to do so. The gospel is the good news of Christ doing that for us.

Poverty implies being in need. We lack the graces of God's Spirit, and we lack much of what we need for a blessed life. The gospel is good news of Christ giving us the Holy Spirit and caring for us in every way.

Poverty can imply someone about to suffer. Our sin brings God's just judgement but Christ has suffered so we may go free. This is the wealth of Christ made ready for our benefit.

Christ spoke of captives set free. People whom God's law confines to punishment find pardon and the freedom of God's children. People who could not overcome their sin find the freedom of God's Spirit. People living in fear of death will enjoy resurrection unto life.

Christ spoke of giving sight to the blind. He did that - literally. He also opens the eyes of our understanding that we may see his glory, know how his grace saves us through Christ, and rejoice in his goodness.

Christ spoke of freeing those who are oppressed. He lifts the burdens of guilt, sin, and fear. The end result is the glorious freedom of the children of God.

THE OUTCOME

With such a Person and such a message we would expect Jesus' hearers to rejoice in hope of the glory of God. The people were amazed at his gracious words.

But they refused to believe he was who he claimed to be. They had to choose between the evidence and their preconceived ideas. The gospel forces the same choice today.

Jesus brought their thoughts into the open. They wanted him to prove his claims. He reminded them there was a history of God's prophets being rejected by their own people. When Israel refused God in the days of Elijah and Elisha God sent his prophets to bring good to strangers.

That hurt their pride. They thought they had every right to God's blessing. They would not accept criticism and they hated the thought of 'inferior' foreigners getting a blessing that was meant for them. They were not convicted of their sin and they had no understanding of God's grace (we all start on the same footing and God is free to forgive whoever he chooses).

Their rejection of Jesus, the convicting Spirit, and the grace of God was total. They tried to silence Jesus by killing him. They preferred murder to the blessings Isaiah had promised.

There was a sequel. Jesus escaped and brought God's blessing to the needy places outside his own land - as the prophet had said (Isaiah 9:1-2; Matthew 4:15-16).