

BEHOLD HIM AS A PREACHER

Luke 4:16-22

The synagogue in Nazareth, as well as those in other places, was a place for public worship. There the Jewish people gathered for acts of sacrifice, devotion, prayer and praise, reading and expounding the Holy Scriptures. The synagogue in Nazareth was almost as familiar to Christ Jesus as was His home. Through the years of His boyhood and early manhood He had gone there as regularly as He had gone to the toil of the carpenter's bench on the other six days of the week. Now He had been away for more than a year. He had been in Judea, and there He had had some great experiences. He had been baptized in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. He had emerged victoriously from the temptations of Satan. During His public ministry He had made a tour, and news about it had doubtless provoked a lot of wonder and curious inquiry, as well as numerous remarks, on the part of the people among whom He had been reared. Now He had returned to His home town. Having heard so many glowing reports of the marvelous signs and wonders attendant upon His ministry in other places, His fellow-townsmen were curious about and anxious to see Him perform some miracle when He appeared in their midst.

After the fame of Christ's sermons and miracles had spread abroad and He had returned to Nazareth, the citizens watched Him very closely as He walked along the streets. The people were anxious to hear Him, now that He had become so prominent, and had created such a sensation in Jerusalem and other places. When it was rumored that their townsman might preach at the synagogue, the people of Nazareth assembled there in unusual numbers on the Sabbath.

We are told that Christ entered the synagogue, "as his custom was." In that statement there is a message for everyone. Our Lord had grown up in Nazareth. When He dwelt there, from His infancy and childhood, it had been His custom to attend the services in the place where the Word of God was read and expounded and where the people assembled for prayer. To Him the synagogue represented the authority of God in Nazareth. Christ always had the habit of ordering His life according to the will of His heavenly Father. With literal truth He said, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work" (John 4:34). Public worship was part of the routine life of our Saviour. When the sabbath came He never had to decide whether or not He would go to the synagogue. Worship there was a regular part of His weekly routine.

Christ was evidently accustomed to participating publicly in the services at the synagogue. So, that was a memorable hour when, after His return to Nazareth, He appeared in His home synagogue. What memories must have surged through His mind as He entered the synagogue, where He had worshiped so many times! His boyhood associates were there and watching Him. All of them were curious; a few of them were sympathetic, others were jealous, and still others were contemptuous. There was just about the same cross-section of mental and spiritual attitude we would find today when any young preacher preached his first sermon in his home church. But there was one present whose attitude was different from all the rest. That was His mother, Mary. She did not know how His listeners would respond to His preaching. Of course, Christ knew that a prophet is not without honor except in His own country. It is still true everywhere that those who are brought in from elsewhere are more highly esteemed than the ones who are at home.

After the service had been opened with prayer, the first of the two lessons for the day was read. Then the Lord Jesus was officially invited to read from the Holy Scriptures and to expound them. When the scroll was placed in His hands, He unrolled it and, while standing, read the famous passage which is recorded in the sixty-first chapter of Isaiah. He then rolled up the parchment, returned it to the attendant, and sat down to expound the Scriptures. It was the custom in those days for the minister to sit down and preach or teach, while the people stood to listen. If that were the practice in our churches today, fewer church members would sleep through the services.

With every eye fastened on Him, and every ear attent to His words, Christ said: "This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears." All listened to Him with marked attention, astonishment, and wonder. Truly, "Never man spake like this man." Although the members of His audience were spell-bound as they listened to His sermon, they were highly prejudiced against the truth which He uttered.

Christ boldly preached that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him, and that He had been anointed to do certain things:

I. To preach the gospel to the poor.

The poor of His day were penniless and friendless, but He had something to say to them. What was the gospel which Christ came to preach to the poor? It was the good news that salvation is by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He offered salvation to every sinner who would receive Him as Saviour. It is a striking fact that, down through the centuries, in every land where the gospel of Christ has been preached it is primarily the poor who have received and rejoiced in its message. Even though nineteen centuries have gone since Christ preached in Nazareth, His gospel is still being preached to the poor in many nations. Anybody who has God for his Father and Christ for his Saviour is rich indeed, but those who are not the children of God are paupers, regardless of what else they may possess.

II. To heal the broken-hearted.

Oh, what a mission! The broken-hearted are on every hand. Many hearts are broken by unexpected disappointment, failure, and the loss of loved ones by death. Those who preach to broken hearts always have appreciative listeners. A loving interest convinces a broken heart that somebody cares.

III. To preach deliverance to the captives.

Sin imprisons. The worst master that anybody ever had is Satan. The only deliverer from the power of Satan is Christ. He came to save us from sin to righteousness, from selfishness to usefulness, and from hell to heaven.

IV. To give sight to the blind.

Physical blindness is bad. Mental blindness is worse. Moral blindness is still worse. Spiritual blindness is the worst of all. Christ not only offered physical sight, but spiritual vision as well.

V. To liberate the bruised.

Bruises are the inevitable result of sin. Christ alone can heal these bruises. This much-needed and invaluable work constitutes one important phase of Christ's mission.

VI. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.