

“ONE SABBATH IN NAZARETH”

**I. Introduction**

- A. One of the most powerful indicators of the darkness that reigns in the heart of fallen man is the fact that so many people persist in refusing to trust in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the gospel.
1. As we see in the verses we have just read, Jesus came announcing good news, news of liberation from the oppressive power of sin.
  2. Yet the people who heard that wonderful pronouncement on that Sabbath day in Nazareth responded by trying to kill Jesus.
  3. Of course, not everyone opposes Jesus so violently.
  4. Some simply ignore him.
  5. Others might be willing to say that they admire Jesus in some respects, yet they are not willing to embrace him as he is presented to us in the pages of holy Scripture.
- B. We see an example of the latter in Benjamin Franklin’s response to an inquiry that was sent to him not long before his death.
1. The inquiry came from Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, and he wanted to know what Franklin believed about Jesus.
  2. Here is what Franklin said in response: “As to Jesus of Nazareth, my opinion of who you particularly desire, I think the system of morals, and his religion, as he left them to us, the best the world ever saw, or is likely to see; but I apprehend it has received various corrupting changes, and I have... some doubts as to his divinity. Tho’ it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and, think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.” [cited

in Stephen Nichols, *Jesus Made in America*, 47]

3. Franklin certainly knew what the Bible has to say about Jesus.
4. He was a great admirer of the preaching of the evangelist George Whitefield.
5. Yet in this letter, written when he knew that his time in this world was drawing to an end, Franklin brushed aside the deity of Christ as a matter of little consequence.
6. His response to Jesus was not marked by the violence that we see from the people in this text in Luke, but it was fundamentally the same.
7. Both instances show that, apart from God's grace, fallen man has no interest in the salvation that Jesus came to bring.

## II. Good News Proclaimed

- A. Our text opens by describing the beginning of Jesus's ministry in the region of Galilee.
  1. He quickly became something of a sensation, as people recognized his divine power and authority.
  2. Notice that Luke once again calls our attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in Jesus's public ministry.
  3. He returned from the wilderness in the power of the same Spirit who had led him out into the wilderness, the same Spirit who came upon him at his baptism, the same Spirit by whom he was conceived in the Virgin's womb.
  4. And when he preached in the synagogue at Nazareth, he declared that the text from Isaiah that begins with the words "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" was being fulfilled in him.

5. The Father had fulfilled his promise to equip the Son with the gift of the Holy Spirit so that he could faithfully carry out his mission as the last Adam.
- B. Luke tells us that when Jesus came to his hometown of Nazareth, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, "as was his custom."
1. Jesus faithfully attended public worship on the Sabbath.
  2. If our Lord made this his regular practice, then we should certainly do the same.
  3. Because Jesus had already gained a reputation as a teacher, he was given the opportunity to expound Scripture in the synagogue, an honor that was typically extended to visiting rabbis.
  4. When Jesus was handed the scroll, he read these words from the book of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18-19 ESV)
  5. This was a prophecy of the Messianic age, the day of the Lord, the time when God would finally deliver his people from their sin and its miserable consequences.
  6. After reading this text, Jesus sat down and declared, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."
  7. He was telling his fellow Nazarenes that the Messianic age was dawning.
- C. One thing that is significant about Jesus's reading from Isaiah is that he stopped reading in mid-sentence.
1. Isaiah 61:2 says, "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God."

2. Jesus did not read the second half of that verse.
  3. This was not a natural place to stop reading.
  4. Why did he do this?
  5. He did it because the day of vengeance has not yet arrived.
  6. While the Old Testament prophets speak of all aspects of the Messianic age as happening all at once, the New Testament reveals that the last days unfold in both an “already” phase and a “not yet” phase.
  7. Jesus came into the world the first time to usher in the day of grace, the period when the gospel is being proclaimed throughout the earth.
  8. The day of vengeance will not arrive until the day of Christ’s return.
  9. Only at his second coming will the final judgment be at hand.
- D. Jesus said that he came to proclaim good news to the poor.
1. This does not mean that Jesus’s mission, and by extension the church’s mission, is about transforming social structures and improving the lot of those who suffer from material poverty.
  2. While Jesus was not indifferent to those who suffered from poverty, he did not go about remedying poverty on a large scale.
  3. Christians should certainly have empathy for the plight of the poor.
  4. We should do what we can to bring relief to the impoverished people that we know.
  5. But we also need to remember that we will never succeed in eliminating poverty in this present evil age.

6. After all, Jesus himself said, “the poor you always have with you.” (Mk. 14:7)
7. Moreover, we must not lose sight of the fact that Jesus came to deal with the root problem, the source of all of the misery that is experienced in this world.
8. Jesus came to deal with the problem of sin.
9. Poor people are just as sinful as everyone else.
10. Their ultimate need is the same as the need of everyone else: to be delivered from our state of spiritual destitution.
11. When Jesus said that he came to proclaim good news to the poor, he wasn’t just talking about one strata of society.
12. He was announcing the gospel to all of those who recognize their state of spiritual impoverishment, to all who are willing to come to him and say,

*Nothing in my hand I bring,  
Simply to thy cross I cling.*

- E. This is underscored by the other images of salvation that are employed in these verses from Isaiah.
1. Jesus came to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind.
  2. In our fallen condition, we are all enslaved to Satan, sin, and death.
  3. We are all plunged into the blackness of evil and error.
  4. The only way our bonds can be broken is by turning to Christ in faith.

5. The only way our blind eyes can be made to see is by coming into Christ's light.

### III. Good News Rejected

- A. As the people of Nazareth heard Jesus say these things, they were impressed.
  1. They looked at one another and said, 'Can you believe that this is the same Jesus that we knew when he was a boy?'
  2. He was one of them.
  3. They had a sense of hometown pride as they listened to him speak.
  4. They also liked his message.
  5. Life was hard under the Romans.
  6. They were ready for better times.
  7. The "year of the Lord's favor" sure sounded good to them.
- B. It is at this point that we see Jesus do something that is quite surprising.
  1. Instead of telling these people more of what they wanted to hear, he did the exact opposite.
  2. 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."
  3. Jesus knew their hearts.
  4. He knew why they were drawn to him.
  5. He knew that they wanted him to perform among them the miracles that he had been performing elsewhere.

6. They were not interested in Jesus's message.
  7. They only wanted an improvement of their circumstances.
  8. There were plenty of sick and lame people in Nazareth.
  9. Jesus should heal them.
  10. He should make his hometown the illustrious center of his wonder-working ministry.
- C. Having exposed this, Jesus then draws a parallel with what happened with the prophets Elijah and Elisha in the Old Testament.
1. Those men were great prophets who performed mighty works that attested that they were sent from God.
  2. Yet God's people's rejected their message, and as a result their miracles benefitted those outside of Israel.
  3. The same thing was now going to happen with Jesus.
  4. His own people will reject him, and he will take his message elsewhere.
  5. In saying this, he was foreshadowing the Gentile mission.
  6. The gospel would be taken from the Jews who rejected it and proclaimed among the nations.
- D. It almost seems as though Jesus purposely offended these people.
1. Why was he so blunt?
  2. Why wasn't he more tactful?
  3. The reason why he spoke this way was because he had to make it clear that he will not let people dictate the terms of their acceptance

of him.

4. He defines the kind of Savior he is.
  5. Jesus came to Nazareth announcing salvation from sin, but the people of Nazareth weren't interested in that kind of salvation.
  6. They wanted something else.
- E. We see the same thing in the world today.
1. Many people are receptive to Jesus as long as they can set the terms of how he is going to help them.
  2. But when it comes to accepting Jesus as he is presented in the pages of the Bible, many take offense or simply shrug their shoulders.
  3. If you are a Christian, think of how amazing it is that you have not responded to Jesus in this way.
  4. Why have you accepted him as your Savior and Lord?
  5. Why haven't you taken offense at his invitation to come to him and be cleansed of your spiritual defilement?
  6. Why haven't you set his gospel aside as boring or irrelevant?
  7. It is not because you are better, or smarter, or more spiritual than anyone else.
  8. On the contrary, it is because God has opened your eyes to see the misery of your spiritual condition apart from Christ.
  9. Only the Lord can open our eyes to see our poverty, our blindness, our captivity.
  10. Only the Lord can enable us to embrace the good news of Jesus Christ with joyous and grateful faith.



11. As Jesus himself said, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." (John 6:44 ESV)

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Not everyone who rejects Jesus does so as violently as the people in Nazareth did on that Sabbath day.
- B. In fact, it is common today to see people give Jesus their mild approval in certain respects while setting aside the heart of his message.
- C. That being the case, these words spoken by J. Gresham Machen in a radio address over eighty years ago ring just as true today, and they serve as a fitting conclusion to our consideration of this text:

"What will you do with Jesus? Will you treat him with mild approval? Ah, people are so patronizing in the presence of Jesus today. They say such kind, polite things about him. They are good enough to say that his ethics will solve the problems of society... They are perfectly ready to let him influence some departments of their life. They will not receive him as their Savior; they are not interested in his atoning blood, but they are so complacent in his presence.

"God grant that it may not be so with you, my friends! God grant that you may never treat Jesus with this polite, patronizing approval! God grant that you may not treat him as a religious genius or as the founder of one of the world's religions! God grant that, instead, you may say to Jesus, with doubting Thomas: 'My Lord and my God' (John 20:28)." [*The Person of Jesus*, 58]