

The Danger of Unbiblical Desires

In my last article, entitled "The Danger of Deception," we saw that Jesus Christ has come to bring salvation to all those who believe in him by faith. Sadly, rather than preaching the good news, many false teachers have preached a false gospel of health and wealth. We can be deceived by others and we can deceive ourselves. Along with outright deception, we often want to dictate our beliefs and project our unbiblical desires on to scripture. Sadly, even in Jesus' own day, many had already made up their minds about the message that they would accept.

We saw last time that Jesus had arrived at the synagogue in Nazareth. While there, he reads from a scroll from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah which speaks of One who would "...proclaim good news to the poor" and "liberty to those who are oppressed." Jesus then "rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant" and declared, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Amazingly, without any fanfare; without any trumpets blowing or anything else to announce his arrival, Jesus forthrightly declares that he is the Servant whom Isaiah prophesied would come. It's certain that the people gathered in Nazareth that day did not fully comprehend, at least initially, all that Jesus was proclaiming about himself. And yet, there would certainly have been knowledge about the Messianic claims in this and other passages from Isaiah. In Luke 4:22 we read:

"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?'" On the one hand there seems to be an initial acceptance, but on the other hand there is certainly confusion and maybe even skepticism. It's as if they're saying, "We know this young man and we know his family. Can he really be claiming to be the One who will usher in the Messianic Kingdom?" Although Jesus is initially received—probably lukewarm at best—there was certainly an initial elation about his message. After they had "marveled at the gracious words," Jesus speaks in a penetrating way about their thoughts and desires. "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."

We know that Jesus had performed a number of miracles in his first year of public ministry. At one point Jesus is asked to go down to Galilee and heal an official's son. Jesus replies, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not

believe.” (John 4:48) Like this man, Jesus knows what these people in the synagogue at Nazareth are thinking: “Why do you perform miracles somewhere else? If you want us to believe that you’re who you claim to be, we want to see some miracles here in your hometown.” Jesus goes on in Luke 4:25-27 to extend his teaching in a way that this Nazareth congregation had not expected.

“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, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. 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.” Why is Jesus referencing these two prophets and their selective miracles? It’s interesting to note that both of these miracles were performed by Jewish prophets on behalf of Gentiles. Unfortunately, many in Jesus’ day believed that when the Messiah came he would come strictly for the Jewish people. Many believed that because of their birthright as Jews they would have to be admitted into the kingdom of God (Luke 3:8; John 8:39). But this is not the message that Jesus came to bring. Rather, Jesus is telling them that God’s grace and mercy is extended outside Israel to include all those, and only those, who truly believe in Jesus (John 3:16; 6:37, 44).

How often do Christians today want to pick and choose what we believe about God’s word? If some teaching seems to go along with what we already believe and accept, we’re good. If, on the other hand, we hear some teaching that challenges us and even takes us out of our comfort zone, we can find ourselves grumbling and even rebelling. Our rebellion can take the form of placing *what we want*—i.e., unbiblical desires—on to the text of Holy Scripture. In the synagogue at Nazareth the initial lukewarm acceptance of Jesus and his message is about to change dramatically. We’ll see their response to Jesus’ teaching next time.

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