

What Type of Messiah Is Jesus?

Many people are familiar with the following passage from Luke 4:16-21 --

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord." Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing."

I don't suppose many people actually go to Isaiah 61:1-2 to see the original text that Jesus read that day. Allowing for the minor difference that can easily be explained by the realities of a culture that relied mostly on oral traditions instead of the written word (the printing press, after all, was still about 1400 years in coming), what Jesus read here matches the first verse of Isaiah 61 but only the first sentence of the second verse!

The two remaining lines, along with the third verse, is "and a day of vindication by our God; To comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, To give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit."

Now, this whole chapter from Isaiah talks about the "great reversal:" a time when the oppressed (Jewish) will be honored while the rest of the world becomes servants. It would certainly be appropriate for Jesus to read the first three verses of the chapter, as they all point to Him as being the Messiah.

But He didn't read the first three verses, He read less than half of them. Why?

Let's start with the second line of the second verse, "and a day of vindication by our God." Now, vindication can mean several things. Generally, it means to justify something or to make something right. But this justification is not normally associated with the "forgiving" kind, but rather the "avenging" type. Not only does the end of the second verse and the whole of the third verse support the "avenging" interpretation, the rest of the chapter does so as well. Verse 3 specifically identifies the Jews as being vindicated. Based on Isaiah 61, we see that it's not so much that the Jews thought they needed justification from their sins, but rather to have things made right that the foreigners had made wrong.

No doubt the elders and religious leaders present knew exactly what should have followed where Jesus left off, and I see no reason why any other devout Jew listening to Jesus that day would not know that Jesus dropped off in mid-verse either. Jesus was sending a message by what He did *not* say, but did they understand it?

As we read the rest of the chapter of Luke, we see that those in the synagogue were at first delighted with what Jesus said, but then their joy turned to doubt. "And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They also asked, 'Isn't this the son of Joseph?'" (verse 22)

It appears to me that, after hearing of some wondrous deeds done in Capernaum (verse 23), they were initially delighted to hear Jesus declaring Himself as the long-awaited Messiah. But as the words He left out began to sink in, they came to realize He was *not* the Messiah they expected!

He was not going to elevate the Jews over the foreigners. He was going to help the needy, no matter what race they belonged to. I realize this is supposition on my part, but look at what Jesus says next.

"Indeed, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was closed for three and a half years and a severe famine spread over the entire land. It was to none of these that Elijah was sent, but only to a widow in Zarephath in the land of Sidon. Again, there were many lepers in Israel during the time of Elisha the prophet; yet not one of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian." (verses 25-27)

If I was wrong in what the childhood neighbors of Jesus were thinking before, Jesus made sure they were thinking it now. They were obviously incapable of accepting that God's view of vindication did not match their own. "When the people in the synagogue heard this, they were all filled with fury. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town had been built, to hurl him down headlong." (verses 28-29)

When talking of oppression, it is very easy to focus on oneself, but this is a deadly trap. Without a conscious effort on our part, we will only see our own situation. We forget that no one's life is without troubles or tribulations. But God sees *everyone's* struggles, and His plan is to provide everyone the great reversal. To focus on our own problems to the point of rejecting the problems of others is not a true act of faith, but rather a rejection of the very solution with which God will deliver us from sin. It is indeed a good thing that we are in love with Jesus, but we need to be sure we are in love with Jesus as He is, not as we want Him to be. We ought to take the time to know the difference, lest we reject Him as His former neighbors did.