

Chosen

Luke 4:21-30 (January 30, 2022)

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²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³He said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Doctor, cure yourself!’ And you will say, ‘Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.’” ²⁴And he said, “Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown. ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Historical Context

Although the initial response is awe, the crowds turned against Jesus because he went outside of the respected in Israel and reached out to the sinners, toll collectors and outcasts. Luke is arguing that such outreach incited anger and hatred and led to Jesus’ execution, prefigured here by the attempt to stone him (i.e., the common method of throwing people over a precipice and then dropping large rocks on them). In Acts we find a similar pattern. An initially positive response among the Jews leads to anger and hatred when the mission opens up to the Gentiles. Luke is using the opening scene of Jesus’ ministry as the key to all that follows in the Gospel and Acts.

Theme: Chosen

Choosing is an action that is full of consequences--some intended and some unintended. If you choose someone, that means you are passing over, or not choosing others. The Bible is full of language related to God choosing a particular people, the descendants of Abraham. The Jewish people had a strong sense of being a “peculiar people,” a nation chosen and blessed by God. But like Jesus, the prophets also reminded the Jewish people that the purpose of their calling was not simply privilege, but so that they might be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 49:6).

Thus, Jesus was trying to remind them of the original purpose of their special relationship with God: to share the blessings of a new way of life with those living in the darkness of oppression, captivity, violence, and fear. Like God’s servants of the past, like Jesus himself, those who claim to have a special relationship with God by virtue of calling and faith are chosen for a reason: to share God’s grace, mercy, love and justice with those around them. We, too, are called to share the blessing of new life that we have been given through our faith in Jesus.

The Epiphany season is really a good time to re-learn the good news that we profess. It is a time to reaffirm our hope in the promises of all the good things that God is always working to bring into all our lives. It’s a time to recognize that the grace of God is emerging all around us, bringing freedom and peace and a fresh start for the least and the lost and the left out. But it’s also a time to remember that we have received all those blessings of new life for a purpose--not to hoard them, or to think of ourselves as special, but to share them with everyone we meet.