

1. Isaiah 60:21-61:3 –

- 21** Your people shall all be **righteous**; they shall possess the land forever, the **branch** (NTZR) of my **planting** (*matta*), the work of my hands, **for the display of my splendor.**
- 22** The least one shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation; I am the Lord; in its time, I will hasten it.
- 1** The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has **anointed** (*Mashach*) me to proclaim **good news** (*basar*) to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners,
- 2** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the **day of vengeance** of our God, to comfort all who mourn,
- 3** and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of **righteousness**, a **planting** (*matta*) of the Lord **for the display of my splendor.**

2. Synagogue Service – There is no “standard” to how a synagogue service was conducted in the first century. In fact, Luke 4 may be the earliest record of a synagogue service.

- **Prayer/Worship/Benedictions** –
 - Recite the *Shema* = “Hear O Israel” - *Shema* is in imperative form (command)
 - *Shema* means to “hear” but also “obey.” So, in Hebrew, hearing and obeying are connected.
- **Torah Scroll** – presentation of the Torah scroll – God’s words – in the midst of the people.
- **Weekly Scripture Reading** (*Parasha*—“portion”): The reading is assigned ahead of time and fulfilled by those in the community.
 - **Torah** – Genesis - Deuteronomy
 - **Haftarah** – A reading from the prophets which generally goes along with the Torah portion.
- **Derashah** – the sermon or reflection or interpretation. Related to the Hebrew word *Derash* – which means to interpret.
- **Priestly Blessing** – only if a priest is in attendance.

3. Read Luke 4:14-30 –

¹⁴ Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside.

¹⁵ He was teaching in their synagogues, and **everyone praised him**.

¹⁶ He went to **Nazareth**, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue, **as was his custom**.

He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the **prophet Isaiah** was handed to him. (*haftarah*)
Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: (Isaiah 61:1-2)

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the **attendant** (see Luke 1:2 – ‘servants of the word’), and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

²¹ He began by saying to them, “Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (*Derashah*)

²² **All** spoke well of him and were **amazed** at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

²³ Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ (prove it...) And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

Jesus Insults Their Faith and *THEN* is Rejected -

²⁴ “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. (Joseph, Moses, David)

²⁵ I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time when the sky was shut for three and a half years, and there was a severe famine throughout the land.

²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.

²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were **furious when they heard this**.

²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built in order to **throw him off the cliff**. (a Jewish stoning).

³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (see Deuteronomy 17:7 below)

4. Deuteronomy 17:7:

“The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward, the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.”

- Stoning, as a death penalty, is carried out by the community after the individual has appropriately been found guilty of a crime that carries death by stoning.
- There must be at least 2 – 3 witnesses. A death penalty cannot be assigned if there is only one witness.
- The **hands of the witnesses** must be the first ones to push the individual to their eventual death. This means that if you lied about what the individual did, then you become a murderer in God’s eyes.
- If the initial fall does not kill the convicted individual, then everyone in the community who thinks he is guilty will drop *one* stone. The community is not allowed to administer mob justice, allow passions to take over, or purposefully desecrate the body made in the image of God.

4. Calling Faith into Question:

- The Hebrew concept of faith extends well beyond a statement of belief or the belief in the proper doctrines.
- Faith is **expressed in action**. Faith is a verb. Faith is action-oriented as a demonstration of a trusting covenant relationship with God rather than a passive belief.
- Doubt is not a threat to faith. In areas of doubt, you are to wrestle with God and ask for revelation without letting the doubt overtake you.

5. Elijah and Elisha –

- Israel wasn’t demonstrating their faith before God, so He sent Elijah and Elisha to Gentiles who did demonstrate trusting faith.
- Jesus withholds Messianic blessings – essentially saying Nazareth is not demonstrating faith.
- Perhaps, they were arrogant and consumed with God’s promises of greatness among the nations (Isaiah 60: 21-22) rather than fulfilling their covenant obligations of justice and taking care of those in need.

6. **Group Dynamics in Nazareth:** The “family story” of Nazareth is that “God will bless us merely because we are in the line of David.” This requires no action on their part (see also Matthew 3:9; Luke 3:8; or John 8:39. Jesus and John the Baptist contend with anyone whose claim to God’s favor is their descendancy from Abraham).

Anxiety and Group Dynamics¹

- Groups (family, church, community) can be driven by anxiety, often without even being aware of what is happening.
- New experiences, ideas, and challenges can all produce anxiety in both individuals and groups. Individuals and groups feed off each other, which can lead to anxiety rising and falling together.
- “As the need to defend against anxiety increases, the need to know diminishes, and one’s mind becomes incrementally closed to different views—all in the unarticulated hope that rigid adherence to beliefs or a cause will secure connection, respect, and dignity.”

Rigid Group Narratives and Resistance to Change

- For some groups, differences or challenges to the dominant narrative are difficult to accept.
- “In these communities, there is only one possible interpretation of events, one group story, one valid perception of truth.”
- Such systems are typically anxious and undifferentiated.

Spiritual Growth, Maturity, and Adaptability

- Spiritual growth is enhanced by a person or group’s ability to tolerate change, manage stressful events, and remain in conversation with one another.
- Tolerating change and managing stressful events require strong character and spiritual maturity. The Nazarites' response is not mature; they act like children.

Jesus at Nazareth: A Case Study in Group Exclusion

- The movement of a member – in this case, Jesus - away from the one past, familiar story means that the member is threatened with exclusion from the family, either emotionally or physically.
- Those who go against a distorted family story and refuse to behave as if the image were actually the reality are often ostracized, scapegoated, believed to be bad (Matt. 12:24), or treated as though they were defective (John 9:34) and perhaps sick.
- Rather than examining their underlying assumptions and facing the challenge of adjusting their thinking or behavior, people found it easier to reject Jesus.

¹ Brown J.K., Dahl C., and Reushling, W.C. – *Becoming Whole and Holy: An Integrative Conversation about Christian Formation*