*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

March 20 - 25

“The Life of Jesus: Rejection”

**Monday, March 20 Luke 4:14-30**

*“They intended to push him over the cliff”*

 Jesus makes three points: (1) He is anointed by the Holy Spirit to perform a specific ministry; (2) he is a prophetic figure who declares the arrival of a new era; and (3) he will bring about the release from captivity that he proclaims. Jesus concludes his remarks by telling his audience that they are seeing the fulfillment of the words of the prophet Isaiah. The crowd reacts with marvel at Jesus’ words. But the issue of Jesus’ pedigree raises questions in their minds. How can a simple man like Joseph’s son possibly be all the things declared by Isaiah?

 Jesus responds by citing a proverb expressing a request that one should do one’s work in one’s own backyard to prove one’s claims. But, says Jesus, even if he performed miracles in Nazareth, they still wouldn’t believe. Then he reminds them of how several Jewish prophets ministered to Gentiles but not to their fellow Jews, inferring the reason being the Jews’ lack of faith. His remarks anger the crowd, and they try to cast him over the cliff. Instead Jesus walks away. Like their ancestors of old, Jesus’ contemporaries have missed the chance to believe.

*I believe, Lord, that you are the fulfillment of prophecy. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 21 Mark 3:20-30**

*“He is out of his mind”*

 Besides the awestruck crowds who have heard of Jesus’ deeds and who come to him, there are two other groups of people who come with a very different view of Jesus. Jesus’ family intrudes to take him home. They are intent on silencing him, presumably to squelch any further unwanted attention from the authorities. They may be spurred by the noble but misguided desire to protect him from danger or, less nobly, to salvage the family reputation. The religious authorities from Jerusalem come with the intention of defaming Jesus and sabotaging his movement.

 Their strategy is to accuse Jesus of being in league with evil, that what he does is not by the power of God but by the power of Satan. This Jesus labels as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, an unpardonable sin. To reject Jesus out of unbelief is one thing, but attacking the power by which he works is something far more serious. If one is weak, one can be encouraged. If one is ignorant, one can be informed. But, if one is willfully blind and deaf and rejects help, what can be done? One has cut oneself off from what might lead to repentance.

*I affirm, Lord, that the Spirit was in you and is now in me. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 22 John 15:18-25**

*“The world hated me before it hated you”*

 Discipleship is a costly endeavor and whoever chooses to follow Jesus must be ready to experience the sort of conflict he has seen and will soon endure. But Jesus will send the Spirit who will provide comfort and guidance in these conflicts. Jesus explains the hatred of the world as a continuation of the hatred he personally witnessed throughout his public ministry. Jesus has been hated because as the light, he exposes the world’s deeds and unmasks them as evil. Jesus discusses the guilt of the world by explaining that it is accountable before the revelation of God. Jesus’ ministry provided both words and works that pointed to God. Now that they have seen and heard him, their unbelief is their guilt.

 Believers must be careful not to take these words of Jesus as representing the only thing he said about the world. While we must not be caught unawares by the world’s opposition to the Gospel, we must at the same time recognize God’s love for the world (John 3:16) and our responsibility to witness to that love. More than ever, we will need the Spirit’s help.

*Give me wisdom, Lord, to live a life that honors you in a world that doesn’t. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONAL*

March 20 - 25

“The Life of Jesus: Rejection”

**Thursday, March 23 Luke 10:1-12**

 *“I am sending you out as lambs among wolves”*

 On this occasion Jesus is sending out the seventy, much as the twelve were sent out earlier (Luke 9). The instructions are very much the same as those given the twelve. First he sent them out in pairs. It seems there is a synergy – a spiritual energy – released when two or more are involved in the same ministry. The seventy are told to take no luggage and to get going without delay. Jesus says that their mission will be a dangerous one. They will be lambs among wolves.

 He says again, as he said to the twelve, that they are not to bless the unwilling. Don’t waste your time on people who are indifferent or get angry or want to argue. Jesus advises us to tell the exciting news to those who are eager to hear. He says, “Do not go from house to house” socializing. In other words, the seventy were not to stop and engage in idle chit-chat. They were to live simply, heal the sick, and proclaim the Kingdom of God.

 God gives this same commission to us if we are his people. As he sent the seventy, so he sends us out with the same authority and the same commission.

*In spite of opposition, Lord, I will share the gospel with others. Amen.*

**Friday, March 24 Matthew 16:1-4**

*“They came to Jesus and tested him”*

 Once again Jesus is confronted by the religious leaders. Although they are often bitter opponents, the Pharisees and Sadducees join forces because they see Jesus as a threat to their leadership. They come to Jesus to test him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven. But a sign can be interpreted in different ways. Although their request appears innocent enough, Matthew emphasizes that they are not asking in good faith. They are hoping Jesus will appeal to some kind of heavenly sign that they can twist and use against him.

 Jesus sees through their ruse and calls them to be accountable for the signs of his messianic identity and mission that he has already displayed. Because they are not seeking in good faith, the only validating sign Jesus will give them of his messianic authority will be his resurrection, which will be like the sign of Jonah whose appearance to the citizens of Nineveh, bringing the message of God, caused them to repent. Similarly, Jesus’ resurrection from the dead will be the world’s sign to repent and receive him as their Savior.

*I believe in you, Lord, for your resurrection is the sign of your truthfulness. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 25 Matthew 16:5-12**

*“He was speaking of the false teaching of the Pharisees”*

 Crossing the Sea of Galilee, the disciples have forgotten to bring along provisions for the trip. Jesus takes the occasion to instruct them about the Pharisees and Sadducees who have just tried to entrap him. Jesus earlier used yeast as a positive metaphor to represent the permeating nature of the kingdom of heaven. Now he uses it as a negative metaphor to indicate how the evil of corruption can permeate what is good. The disciples, however, are so preoccupied with their physical needs that they are unheeding of Jesus’ spiritual teaching.

 Followers of Jesus must be spiritually sensitive to his teaching. Their lack of understanding implies they have not remembered Jesus’ miracles, which all along have acted as a confirmation of Jesus’ identity and were designed to induce faith in those with receptive ears and hearts. But Jesus patiently leads these fumbling disciples into the meaning that he intends them to understand, which includes their need to be on guard against the threat these religious leaders are to Jesus and his mission.

*Protect me, Lord, from the corrupting influence of the world. Amen.*