

REJECTED IN NAZARETH

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KEY VERSE:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

Luke 4:18-19

FAITH STORY:

Luke 4:16-30

FAITH FOCUS:

Jesus was reading the scripture in the temple and announced that he was anointed to preach and do miracles. The people of Nazareth were pleased and impressed with his words, but wondered about it all because they knew him as Joseph's son. Jesus then tells them that a prophet isn't accepted in his hometown, and refers back to the stories of Elijah and the widow, and Elisha and Naaman. The people of Nazareth understood Jesus' words and the implications for them: God's Kingdom is for all people, not just those who believe themselves to be God's chosen people. The people didn't like to hear that and tried to kill Jesus, but he walked through the angry mob to safety.

SESSION GOAL:

Students will learn that God's Jubilee Good News was for Gentiles as well as Jews.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Understand the story of Jesus' rejection at Nazareth
- Understand Jesus' message that God's Good News is for all people
- Think about how they can commit to this mission statement of Jesus

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1** Colorful 8 1/2 x 11 paper and pens for students to use to make party invitations.
- 2** Earthworms or something equally disgusting to eat. Package it so you have one package for each student.
- 3** Dry erase board, chalk board or newsprint

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (10 minutes)

Tell students that they are going to invite themselves to a party. They are to take the paper and pens and make an invitation to themselves to the kind of party that they would love to attend.

Directions on folding the paper: Fold it in half, then again in half. Student's name should be on the front, and the party information on the inside. The inside information should list the time, place, and what will happen at the party.

After students have completed their invitations, share them with the group. What are their expectations of the party?

Then say: *I have some ideas about a party for you too, and I'm going to hand out the food that will be at this party.*

Hand out the packages. Give students time to react, then ask: What's wrong with the food I handed out? It didn't meet your expectations of party food? You had certain things in mind for party food, and this didn't meet what you expected?

CONNECT: (5 minutes)

Say: *Sometimes people have the wrong expectations about Jesus. Our story today is about the expectations people had of Jesus when he first began his ministry. Before we get into that story, what do you think people expected of Jesus?*

List those expectations on the board or newsprint.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10 minutes)

Read the scripture passage as follows:

Verses 16-17, 20-21a, 22-23a, 24a—volunteer to read narrator.

Verses 18-19, 21b, 23, 24-27—volunteer to read Jesus' part.

Verses 28-30—Everyone else in class.

Go through the passage again as a class, comparing the list of expectations the students suggested with those that the story reveals. Ask students to discover why the people went from praising Jesus to wanting to kill him in such a short amount of time. What did he say or do? After students have offered their thoughts, cover the following points in a mini-lecture, using the Insights from Scripture for additional information.

- When Jesus read the passage from Isaiah, the Jews expected him to be the Messiah and fulfill the good news of the Year of Jubilee.
- Elijah fed a foreigner when people in his own country were starving.
- Elisha healed Naaman, an enemy of Israel

- These stories from the Old Testament illustrated that Jesus came to share the good news with all people, and he expected his followers to do the same, and to love their enemies as well as their neighbors.

Jesus did not meet the expectations the people of Nazareth had for a Messiah. They didn't want to hear what he was saying about the good news being for everyone, including their enemies. That's why they got so angry at him.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Say: *Sometimes we want Jesus to be more “comfortable” and less “radical.” What did Jesus teach that you find the most difficult to do? What is the most radical thing Jesus asks people to do? What takes you out of your comfort zone to the point where you'd say “Come on, Jesus, do you really mean that?”*

Divide the class into small groups and ask each group to come up with a list of answers to those questions. Share and discuss the answers.

RESPOND: (10 minutes)

Ask students to open their invitations so it's one sheet. The information they wrote earlier should all be on one side of the sheet. Ask them to fold it again, the other way, so they have blank pages to write on. Ask them to put their name on the front again. This time, instruct students to look at Luke 4:18-19 and paraphrase it for their lives on the inside pages. This is their life party. Ask them to personalize it for themselves. How can they commit to this mission of Jesus? How is Jesus calling them to help with this mission?

Invite students who want to share their “life party invitation” with the group to do so, but allow persons to pass if they don't want to share.

Encourage students to take the invitation home and think about what it means to accept that invitation from Jesus for their life.

Close with this prayer:

Spirit of God, anoint each one of us to bring your good news to the people we meet every day. Send us out to proclaim joy, not judgment. Remind us not to oppress others with our words or actions, but to set people free with our love and our kindness. In the name of Jesus, the Messiah who sets us free to follow him, Amen.

INSIGHTS FROM SCRIPTURE

When Jesus read from Isaiah, his listeners expected him to be the Messiah who was fulfilling the Year of Jubilee. (This scripture from Isaiah 61 was considered both a Messianic text and a passage about “the year of the Lord's favor,” which was Jubilee). The Year of Jubilee had been established by God for the Israelites. These laws helped promote an economic system where everyone had a fair chance; those who had gone into debt or slavery were given a second chance at dignified labor. It meant that every seven years, these rules were followed:

- rest of the soil—no tillage or harvest beyond what the land yielded spontaneously. Anyone could reap the harvest of this land this year.

- the freeing of those Israelites who, through poverty or otherwise, had become slaves of their fellow Israelites.
- The canceling of debts.

In addition, every 50th year, the land went back to its original owner.

The design for the Jubilee Year meant that Israelites who had lost their personal liberty or property to their fellow Israelites would have their debts forgiven and be restored to their families and inheritance. This gift of atonement symbolized God's forgiveness of their debts and restoration of them to perfect fellowship with God. It is this idea of grace for all of humanity, bringing freedom to the captive and rest to the weary as well as to the earth, which made the Year of Jubilee the symbol of the Messianic year of grace (Isaiah 61:2). The Messiah would restore the universe to its original harmony, both for humanity and all of creation.

Hearing Jesus read from the prophet Isaiah and identifying himself with that Messianic passage was incredibly exciting for the listeners in Nazareth that day. Then, when Jesus went on to say this Good News was for everyone—foreigners and enemies as well as the Jews—the people were as disturbed as they'd been thrilled. They just weren't ready to go there.

The Jews who heard Jesus in Nazareth weren't the only ones with different expectations of him. Because the Romans occupied the land of Israel, the Zealots wanted a military Messiah to overthrow the Romans. The Pharisees wanted someone to fulfill the scriptures. The Sadducees wanted someone to lead the temple. The Essenes wanted the Messiah to rid the temple of the Sadducees and bring "pure religion" back.

Everybody had their expectations of Jesus, and he came proclaiming a totally different way to live. In many ways, it's the same story today, isn't it?