

Title: What Young Micah Witnessed
Date: March 3, 2024
Subject: Jesus presents himself as the Anointed One sent from God
Scripture: Luke 4:14 - 30

It was one of the most amazing things Micah had seen in his 13 year young life. A mob trying to kill somebody but not being able to because the guy simply walked through the crowd and left.

But that's getting to the end of his story. It began earlier in the day when Micah went to the synagogue for the Sabbath service. He assumed it'd be just like any other Sabbath day because nothing big, important or exciting ever happened in Nazareth. The worshippers would gather to hear the scriptures read, a teacher would explain it, then they'd go home and get back to their routines.

The first indication the day would be different was when Micah got close to the synagogue. There were more people, many more than he expected. And there was a buzz in the air. His curiosity got the best of him, so he wandered among the people to eavesdrop. He caught bits and pieces of conversations...enough for him to understand this was the kind of thing that would make the front page of the local newspaper...if they had that sort of thing in his day. It was more like fresh fodder for the gossip grapevine -- local boy makes good and comes home.

The guest of honor had been to the big city of Jerusalem and caused quite a stir. People had heard stories about what he did and said from those who were there. Since he'd returned to the area, he'd visited nearby villages and finally made it to Nazareth. Word was that wherever he went, everyone praised his insight and ability to help people understand what Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah and others had written.

It was about time to begin so Micah squeezed his way in to find a place. This had the promise of being good. The first Scripture was read. They always started with something from the Torah written by Moses. The synagogue leader did that... in his usual dry and monotonous manner.

Next would be a reading from the prophets. Usually, the synagogue leader chose one of the men, but everyone expected the reading would be done by Jesus. He stood up and the scroll of the book of Isaiah was handed to him. He unrolled it to find words that were familiar to everyone, that the worshippers knew by heart as they captured the unfulfilled longing for the Messiah to come: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Micah wondered how people could hear those words and not think about the Messiah and what he'd do? "The Spirit of the Lord is on me." The Messiah would be chosen and commissioned by God for very specific service. God's hand would be upon him. He'd speak what he heard from God's lips. He'd have authority, abilities, qualifications and power that would set him apart. Power. Power to do incredible miracles.

Anointed to preach good news to the poor. He'd bring the good message that would bring joy to the miserable, the afflicted. Those who don't have much in this life would have the riches the Messiah supplies. The poor in spirit who recognize their spiritual insufficiency and humbly recognize they need God would be rich toward God. He'd bring healing to the broken-hearted.

Sent to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. Those living under the fear of punishment for their sins would be offered pardon and salvation. They'd no longer be captives of to the tyranny of sin and Satan. They'd experience liberty and deliverance for those who had been enslaved by sin.

Sent to proclaim recovery of sight for the blind. The Messiah would be able to relieve physical blindness and more importantly would be able to remove spiritual blindness. He'd open eyes and give understanding.

Sent to release the oppressed. The Messiah would be the chain breaker for those who were bound by sin, guilt and shame. They'd no longer be objects of God's wrath.

Sent to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Not just 365 days but an era when God would bring in newness of life and bestow his grace, mercy, kindness, love, and favor . . . the Golden Age.

It amazed Micah the amount of productive daydreaming that could go through a person's mind in a short time. He got goosebumps thinking about the Messiah's coming.

Micah came back to reality as Jesus finished rolling up the scroll and giving it back to the attendant. Then he sat down to teach. People shifted to see around those in front of them. All eyes were fastened on him as they waited to hear what he had to say.

At last, Jesus spoke, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The bold proclamation was met with a few audible gasps, some grins, maybe a few "amens" and lots of questions running through minds, including Micah's: Could it be? The Messiah was here? Where? Was Jesus working with John the Baptist to help introduce the Messiah?

Jesus continued. It was one of those moments when there was a holy hush. It didn't last for a mere moment. It continued as people leaned in to catch every word.

Jesus kept going back to the words of Isaiah and making the passage personal. He spoke about what he'd said and done. He told about the things he would do. There was no mistake. He was speaking of himself as God's chosen deliverer.

Jesus stopped for a moment. The people began talking, attempting to digest and process what they heard. He wasn't like other teachers who seemed to go through the motions. They were impressed...beyond impressed. They never expected to hear anything like it in their lifetime. The coming of the Messiah was something a person hoped for, but realistically, didn't expect it to be when they were alive. It was a hope for the future. They were surprised, astonished and amazed at all the wonderful and gracious words.

Micah noticed the mood shifting. It began to dawn on the worshippers as to who was speaking to them. They were looking out of the corner of their eyes at Jesus and nodding in his direction: "Wait a minute. Isn't this Joseph's son? Isn't he the kid who helped his dad in the carpenter shop? Does Joseph know anything

about this? What about Mary, his mom? What do his younger brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas think? And his sisters?”

Glowing admiration was replaced by a sense of absurdity, acceptance with disbelief. How could he be him? It was one thing for one of their own who'd been properly trained to teach them, but the son of a carpenter who hadn't been educated? It was nonsensical.

Jesus resumed speaking and the crowd quieted. “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: “Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum. I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for 3 1/2 years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon.”

Micah and the others were quite familiar with the story. It was like a sore thumb that never went away. During Elijah's time, Israel suffered under a drought and famine as divine punishment because they had rejected the Lord. He took care of Elijah with food brought by ravens. Nice story so far. When the water supply dried up, Elijah was told where to go to get food. It came through a miraculous provision of a jar of flour and jug of oil that didn't run out. One teensy problem...no, a huge problem. Elijah was told to go to a foreign land and to get food from a foreigner. Couldn't the Lord have performed a miracle like that someplace in Israel?

Before the crowd came to grips with what Jesus was saying, he continued, “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.” Another slap in the face. Naman was another pagan, one who engendered much less sympathy than a widow. He was the commander of the occupying army oppressing Israel. They were repulsed by him. Yet he was the one who was healed of leprosy and not one of the hundreds, maybe thousands of Jewish lepers who longed to be healed.

Micah sensed things were going sideways. He tried to move toward an outside wall out of the way. People were getting furious. Not just a couple of them, but everyone. The fans became fanatical. The wonder boy had the audacity to throw a bunch of foreigners in their faces and claim that people other than Jews could be the intended recipients of God's grace. This sent the worshippers over the edge and they wanted to send Jesus over the edge.

They arose as if one person and drove Jesus out the synagogue. It didn't occur to anyone that the synagogue service hadn't been formally dismissed. It didn't occur to anyone it was the Sabbath, a day set aside for the things of God, to think about him, to worship him... and what they were doing definitely wasn't in the spirit of the day. It didn't occur to anyone that they hadn't undergone a formal judicial process to find out if the person was guilty. It didn't occur to anyone that they were acting like the Zealots by being judge, jury and executioner of a person viewed as their enemy.

The crowd continued pushing and shoving Jesus out of town. They could have stopped at that point and warned him to leave and never come back.

They wanted more. They wanted to permanently silence his teaching, his silly talk. They were a crazed mob giving full vent to their white-hot wickedness. They were out for blood. They pushed Jesus to the edge of one of the hills common in Nazareth, to where there was a 40-foot drop carved into the side of the limestone mountain. They were ready to shove him off it to his death.

Micah had followed the crowd and sought an elevated position to watch. That's when it happened. It was like everything was in slow motion. The mob yelling and screaming with not a sound coming out of their mouths. Then Jesus walked through the mob and out of town...as if nothing consequential had happened, as if it had been just another day.

He hadn't become invisible or wave his hand to part the crowd like Moses did the Red Sea. He didn't make everybody blind and then gently push aside people to make a path. He didn't step off the precipice and walk on air. Micah thought that really would have showed them. Jesus simply looked at the crowd, calmly spoke and a pathway opened for him to exit.

This incident of Christ's life is found in Luke 4:14-30.

Jesus took a familiar passage, a significant passage about the Messiah from the book of Isaiah. He added eight words: "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." He didn't just mean that the long-awaited promise of the Messiah was finally coming to fulfillment but that it was being fulfilled in a person, in himself. He would be the one to bring God's grace and salvation.

Jesus knew what the people were thinking and told them what they were thinking. They wanted a display of miracles. Jesus told them they wouldn't see any because of their lack of belief. He reminded them their ancestors didn't put their trust in God when God sent his prophets with messages of deliverance. Therefore, God sent the prophets to the Gentile world. In some sense Jesus was telling them that he would also go to the Gentiles and tell them of God's offer of salvation.

Through our study of the life of Christ, we'll see Jesus presented himself as the Messiah, the Christ, as God again and again. People, both his supporters and his enemies, fully understood the claim he was making.

Huston Smith wrote in his book "The World's Great Religions": "Only two people ever astounded their contemporaries so much that the question they evoked was not "Who is he?" but "What is he?" They were Jesus and Buddha. The answers these two gave were exactly the opposite. Buddha said unequivocally that he was a mere man, not a God - almost as if he foresaw later attempts to worship him. Jesus, on the other hand, claimed... to be divine."

The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown became one of the big "religious" books. His characters explored the "truth" that Jesus wasn't declared to be God until 300 years after his death. Sir Leigh Teabing tells Sophie: "My dear, until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet... A great and powerful man, but a man, nonetheless. A mortal." She countered with "Not the Son of God?" Teabing continued: "Right. Jesus' establishment as "the Son of God" was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea." Sophie responded: "Hold on. You're saying Jesus' divinity was the result of a vote?" Teabing:

“A relatively close vote at that” (pp. 233, 234). With that, Brown pronounces “Game over” with his proof that Jesus isn’t God, but a fake.

Brown was correct that there was a Council of Nicea... but that’s about all he had correct. The reason for the Council was a man named Arius was causing considerable confusion by teaching against the accepted belief that Jesus is God. Arius held that Jesus was a created being and not co-eternal with God, less than God but higher than humans.

Over 300 church leaders from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East met to discuss the situation and theology. These men had been persecuted and tortured for the belief in Christ. Some were missing arms or legs. Others were crippled. The leaders debated and voted for a statement which is known as the Nicene Creed. Part of it reads: I believe “in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God.”

The vote to affirm that Jesus is, was, always has been and always will be fully God, rather than being close, was 316 to 2.

I portrayed Micah as an impartial onlooker. I could do it that way or anyway I wanted since I created the story... based on actual events. Micah could have been depicted as joining the murderous crowd. He could have objected and fought against the mob.

People of Jesus’ day either believed or didn’t believe. Some tried to navigate the in-between zone, but there isn’t an in-between zone where people can park and stay there.

Everyone has a choice, Micah, the crowd, you, me, the guy down the street, the new kid at school, the king of Saudi Arabia... believe or don’t believe. The eternal destiny hangs in the balance.