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## “Ditching the Drama”

Sermon Series: *Jesus’s Healthy Habits*, No. 1

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### **Luke 4:16-30**

*Jesus 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. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 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 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.”*

*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!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”*

*24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 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. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*

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We’re in Luke 4 today, if you’d care to turn there with me. The gospel of Luke...and right in the middle of chapter 4.

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“It started out good, but it didn’t end well.”

I wonder how many instances in your life and mine that phrase describes; “It started out good, but it didn’t end well.”

Something from your past jump to mind?

What jumps to my mind is actually a jump.

When I was eight or nine, BMX (that's "Bicycle Moto-Cross")-style bikes were all the rage, and I had the coolest one around. I had a Huffy Thunder Road – number 56. My parents got from Hills Department Store for my birthday.

One summer day, the guys from the neighborhood hatched a plan. We gathered up all the shovels and hatchets and other implements of destruction we could find from our parents' garages and built a BMX track in the woods behind our house. We spent all day doing it, and I don't mind saying...it was fabulous! We had banked turns and slalom paths through lines of trees; we had series' of hills and valleys – whoop-de-dos – that's what you call them...and then toward the end, there was a long, straight stretch where you got up enough speed to hit the big jump over a deep pit of water.

We probably spent as much time building that jump as we did the whole rest of the track. It took forever to dig through all the roots and shale to create what seemed to us at the time to be a huge pit. Then we lined it with plastic and carried water by the buckets from my house to fill it.

It was late afternoon when we finished what was an absolutely great day!

But there was no way we were going home without each of us taking a test run. So Scott Wilson went first, and then Jamie Davis and then Bobby Gilbert and then Bobby's brother, Mike, and then me. We went from smallest to biggest kid, which was very intentional on my part because if there was a problem with the track, I wanted one of them to find it before I did.

I know that sounds self-serving...and it was, but it was in our woods, so I made the rules.

Anyway, as I hit that straight stretch toward the end, I peddled for all I had (and it strikes me that I **had** a lot more back then than I do today.) I got going as fast as I could to hit that jump over the water.

And everything was going so well...I was probably doing 40 miles an hour – at least it seemed like it...and with all the guys lined up there at the end, watching, I hit that jump and...remember I said I was the biggest?

At that age, I had not yet taken physics, because if I had, I would have known that there was no way a guy my size was going to jump that water pit. In my mind, I was going airborne, but in reality, my front wheel dropped off the end of the ramp, stopped dead in the pit, and my bike and I went flying into a tree.

Fortunately, besides my glasses and my bike and my pride, nothing was really hurt, but as those guys all stood there laughing, I remember thinking, man...how could a day that started out so good...end up like this?

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We've all had those kind of days...even Jesus did...and this was one of them.

Things were going well for Him, at least in terms of His notoriety and popularity. The crowds found His teaching just remarkable, and verse 14 there tells us the news about Him was spreading fast. Everyone thought He was just the greatest thing.

And so as it happened, He went to Nazareth - His hometown, and on the Sabbath, at worship, He was given to read, what was obviously a divinely-prescribed passage from Isaiah. Then, He sat down, which was the teaching position of the Rabbi, and He began to teach.

At that point, verse 22 tells us that, all, again, spoke well of Him; they were amazed, in fact, at His words.

The day started out good.

But as Jesus continued teaching, things went...you might say...downhill. The crowd got really, really mad.

Why?

You remember a couple weeks ago...we mentioned how the Jews of Jesus' day did not consider themselves in need of a Savior or of forgiveness or repentance. To them, other peoples may have needed those things, but not them.

They were Jews, after all. They were God's chosen people...God's favorites. They were the insiders. Repentance and forgiveness were for outsiders.

That's what they really thought.

But Jesus disagreed, and in doing so, He said something that made that hometown crowd absolutely furious. He essentially told them, ***"You're not listening to what I'm saying. You act as if you can do no wrong, but the reality is, there've been times when Gentiles have been more pleasing to God than Jews."***

That was the point of His telling the stories of the widow of Zarephath and Naaman. They were gentiles! Foreigners! Yet as Jesus points out from Israel's own history, God chose to bless ***them*** and ***not*** the ***Jews*** of their day who were all in the very same situation.

Jesus' point is that God will go where He's wanted and He will bless those who are open to Him, and if the Jews of His own day wouldn't receive the forgiveness that Jesus had come to provide, the God would give it to other people...even those they'd consider their enemies.

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To say that message was offensive to the crowd there is an understatement. They were so incensed that Jesus would dare exalt Gentiles over them that, verse 29 there says, they rose up and drove Jesus clear to the edge of the hill on which Nazareth was built...intending to throw Him off.

But what happens? We're told that, somehow, Jesus walked right through the crowd and went on His way...to Capernaum, which wound up being an area where He did much of His ministry.

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What started out so good in Nazareth did not end well; what began so positively wound up so disappointing. It nearly perfectly illustrates what John writes in chapter one of His gospel, ***"He came to His own, but His own would not receive Him."***<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 1:11

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It had to be a sad moment for Jesus...to be met with that sort of rejection. I mean, to have those who know you the best threaten to murder you over what you say.

That's pretty extreme.

Few of us have suffered any threat like that.

So what did Jesus do? How did He handle that?

He left. He left those who rejected Him and went on to where His message was more warmly received.

The fact is, there is no record that He ever returned to His hometown...to Nazareth.

In His mind, they had made their choice, and so He was left to make His.

And Jesus' choice here is the living illustration of a principle He tells His disciples in Matthew 10. Jesus said, ***"Whoever will not receive you, nor hear your words, when you depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust from your feet."***

Which is just what He, very dramatically, did here.

There at the brow of the hill, verse 29 says that Jesus, ***"walked right through the crowd and went on His way."***

Now, maybe the fact He was able to do that was a miraculous moment...and maybe not. Maybe the people, just for an instant, came to themselves and realized how extreme their reaction was. We're not told precisely how it happened.

All we're told is that Jesus walked through the crowd of these seething former friends, and never looked back.

They had made their choice, and so He would make His.

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Jesus' ability to intentionally disengage...to do as He said His people, at times, should do...shake the dust off our feet and move on...Jesus' ability to do that in certain moments is just amazing.

We look at that and we're tempted to think, "Wow, that's cold...to walk away and not come back." Maybe we think it uncaring...even unloving...until we remember that it's God, who is love, who is doing it.

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So how to make sense of it?

If I were in Jesus' sandals there, I'd want to fix this. I mean, after all, these people were my heritage, my friends, family...people I'd known all my life. I'd want to do all I could to make everything OK.

If I were in Jesus' place, I'd be so wrapped up in that that I'd be calling, e-mailing, trying to nuance my way into everyone's good graces again.

I mean, that's what nice, loving, Christian people do, right?

But look at what Jesus does! He doesn't even engage in their drama, in their accusations, in their rage, in their arguments with each other about what He said and what He meant by what He said. He doesn't even acknowledge their questions and their calls for clarification.

"How dare you say that?! What do you mean by that? Explain yourself!"

You know that had to be what it was like on that ridge...this sea of angry faces demanding this or that or the other of Him.

He doesn't even acknowledge them. He doesn't let their anger or demands get to Him. Instead, He walks right through the crowd and on down the road and goes on with His day.

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Over the next few weeks, we'll be looking at a few of "Jesus' Healthy Habits;" and here's the first: Jesus does not allow the irrationalities and irresponsibilities and errors of other people to get under His skin. He does not allow the drama of the world to get into him such that it affects Him or His agenda or His moods or His priorities.

Because here's the fact: Jesus knows very well that nothing will distract us from what God is calling us to do more easily and quickly than other people's drama, and particularly their opinions about what we're doing.

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Now, we all have this desire within us to be seen as respectable and peaceable and to be able to get along with everyone...and there's nothing inherently wrong with that. But that desire can become so all-encompassing that we let ourselves get sucked into the drama of the world around us, which, of course, changes like shifting sands.

Frankly, one sad reality of our world is that most people are way too involved in other people's business. We know too much about every little detail of others' lives and we get caught up and wrapped up in drama that we cannot control...that we can do nothing to affect...drama that is, in reality, none of our business.

You say, "Wow, that sounds cold."

I don't mean that we just uncaringly ignore people. But we have to have wisdom about where we engage and where we don't...about where we can bring positive change and where we're just wasting our time...and we need the Spirit's help in determining that difference.

And let me say...if Jesus Himself walked away because He'd done all He could, then who are we to think we can do any more?

There are too many good Christians getting their energies sucked out of them by their engagement in wrong things...arguing with people who are arguing to win, not to be convinced.

There are too many Christ-followers who are caught up in the world's minutiae, involved in both our neighbors' and our world's dramas that we can do nothing about, rather than engaging where we can actually make a difference.

There were plenty of propositions and causes in Jesus' world into which He could have taken a deep dive.

But Jesus knew when to engage and when to go His way...on to the next town...on to Capernaum, even leaving behind His hometown...to do what God had called Him to do.

Jesus knew that He didn't have to prove Himself. He could leave dramatic circumstances with His self-worth intact.

Friends, part of being like Jesus means learning to ditch the drama of the world, and giving ourselves to things that have eternal consequences.

Being like Jesus means we have to know when it's time to go on our way.

When people want to criticize us for simply doing what God calls us to do, we need to learn, from Jesus, how to go on our way.

When people want to argue about non-eternal things...we need to go on our way.

When people expect you to defend yourself...go on your way.

When people attack over social media or whatever...and you know the type who do. They're just like those there at Nazareth, in that, they're not really listening; they're just there to argue or protest. With people like that, we need to go on our way to a place where our words will be heard and our motives won't have to be constantly and meaninglessly defended.

Don't give someone the right to derail you and ruin your day. With the Spirit's help, we can choose what consumes us and what does not.

Part of what it means to be a healthy person means learning when to go on our way...when to shake the world's drama off of us; so we can engage where it matters...so we can focus on people and places where God's already working, and so we can work with Him there to make a real difference.

That is a habit that will, as Taylor Jensen puts it, "keep us healthy in relationship and spirit, and keep our hearts from offense and distraction."

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Do we know how to do this?

To do it in a Christ-like way requires hearing from God's Spirit, because He's the one who'll tell us where to engage and from where to walk away.

We have to be able to hear His Spirit...and of course we have to be willing to obey Him,

even when it's hard,

even when we may not, ourselves, understand,

even when some in the Church critique us,

even when it may cost us in the eyes of the world.

The fact is, sometimes the most effective, caring, loving thing we can do is to shake the dust from our feet and go on our way. Ditch the drama, walk on...through the crowd...and invest where it makes a difference.

Are you willing to do that?

Can you hear the Spirit, even now, saying something about where you need to invest, and from where you need to move on?

**Closing Prayer:**

Ditching the world's drama is one of the healthiest things we can do, but we need the Spirit's guidance and help...and so we ask You, Holy Spirit, to teach us about this. Show us what Jesus' example here means for us.

Show us the things we've allowed ourselves to get unhealthily attached to...those places where we're wasting our time, where our efforts are making no difference at all...and help us to move on from there in ways that honor Christ.

We don't want to be cold to people and causes, but we want to follow Jesus in making eternal impacts with the few days we have. Show us in the days to come what that means for us, we pray.

**Closing Song:**

**Closing Word:**

This instance in Nazareth...with Jesus' own people's reaction to Him...it prefigures the world's hostility to Him that will come later.

In this instance, it was a cliff; but the cliff would soon become a cross.

At the same time, Jesus' escape from the cliff also prefigures His escape from the cross, since, in the end, the tomb could not hold Him.

Just as Jesus walked through the crowd, so He walked through death itself...and on to life...all for our sake.

And so ours it to follow Him, not wasting the days we're given, but ditching the world's drama in order to live a healthy, Spirit-led life...a life like Jesus lived here on earth...so we can live as He lives in eternity.

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