

## **6 Habits of Effective Christians: Follow Jesus Not the Crowd**

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

### **Litany adapted from Romans 11**

**Pastor:** who has known the mind of the Lord

**All:** or who has been his counselor?

**Pastor:** Or who has given a gift to him

**All:** that he might be repaid?

**Pastor:** For from him and through him and to him are all things

**All:** To him be glory forever.

**Pastor:** We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

**All:** Amen

**Genesis 1:1-2** In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup> The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

**Romans 12:1-2** I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Luke 4:16-30** <sup>16</sup> And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, <sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” <sup>20</sup> And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. <sup>21</sup> And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” <sup>22</sup> And

all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?”<sup>23</sup> And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.”<sup>24</sup> And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.<sup>25</sup> But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land,<sup>26</sup> and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.<sup>27</sup> And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.”<sup>28</sup> When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.<sup>29</sup> And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.<sup>30</sup> But passing through their midst, he went away.

*...to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” (19) “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:21)*

*<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind (Romans 12:2)*

It was Jesus custom to go to church (the synagogue) on the Sabbath. He didn't miss church.

For the faithful Jew the Sabbath started Friday on Sundown. Often, they would share a meal together with close family or friends in preparation for the sabbath fast. You see this played out well in the tv series – The Chosen. The Sabbath day would be Saturday. The teachers, movers and shakers in the community – and to be clear the synagogue was the center of the community! You did not miss this social opportunity if not for your business and family networking, your stature in the community. The men

would gather together to discuss all those things we would never dare to discuss today – religion and politics.

The Sabbath would last all of Saturday until they could see three stars in the nights sky. And that would be the time for many to break their fast, again in a social setting with those closest to them.

I think that is a beautiful picture, the family gathering as the sun is setting, well rested from a day of no sports or clubs or work, even housework... watching for those stars to form together so they can start the preparations for a meal.

Jesus had some amount of privilege and was well know to this church family that would gather on Saturdays. It was not in Nazareth proper, but the big city on the sea. Capernaum. This paints the picture of a young man in his 30's – already seen some what as a teacher. Well known not only in his little suburb where he would have gone to school, but in the university town where the best teachers where and from time to time they would get a traveling expert, if they were lucky from Jerusalem.

It is not clear if it was his custom to read on the Sabbath, but that would have been part of his practice as a student learning to become a rabbi. And we know that even at the age of 12 Jesus was discussing the torah and asking the right questions.

What is also unclear is if this was the first time the crowds were amazed by his teaching. Had they always *spoken well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.* (Luke 4:22)

Or was this the first time. This was the beginning of the buzz.

What we can be certain of – is that this moment changed everything. It is almost as if he was waiting for the stars to align. Or maybe, he was surprised when they gave him the scroll of Isaiah. Had he been prepared that when He got this scroll He was going to start his ministry, say what He said, or was it a spur of the moment occasion. Either way it changed everything.

Jesus picks the most important prophecy in Isaiah about the Messiah. He reads it out loud. And we know that even before he starts the normal dialogue about the reading. Even before he does something unusual and proclaims to them what it means, rather than giving them the chance to debate it. They are listening.

Can you picture this, Each Gospel writer tells their remembrance of this moment in a similar way... Matthew and Mark use the same word. They describe the people in the synagogue that day being astonished. John uses the word, 'marveled.' Luke on the other hand gives a play by play of not only what happened after the reading but a play by play of what happens after outside the synagogue.

Were the disciples there. Probably not, fisherman was an important job, but exhausting. There are other hints that day laborer may not have been as welcome for the gathering. Certainly wouldn't have great seats, maybe would have had to sit outside because of the crowd.

The way Matthew and Mark tell us about this faithful day, they probably were not there. They go from the story of the synagogue to the story of their first encounter with Jesus, their calling. And they both tell those stories as if they had no idea who Jesus was.

But the way Luke tells of this moment it is as if he was there. Probably was.

Can you picture this. Jesus reads THE prophecy... It is a dimly light room, maybe some candle light, but most of the light only coming in from what the windows have to offer and there are most likely people sitting in those windows and there is a great crowd of people the light has to filter through.

The movers and shakers, moms and dads, grandmas and grandpas are eager to learn. People who do appreciate a fresh perspective, maybe a little hope. But these families are also eager to establish their families' place in the community. These people are also politically oppressed. Capernaum is not the center of Roman activity in the region, but it is the biggest town in the area. Certainly where the taxes are collected. Roman soldiers milling about. Daily reminders that they are not free.

What would the room been like. One side and the center all filled with men. Another well not side, corner really, separated by a cloth wall from the speaker and huddle of men... In this corner is where the women would be and really only the most privileged of women.

Can you picture it. Jesus – perhaps the pride of the community – look at this young mans potential... Jesus begins to speak, the room is hushed and he says this:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... and it is clear to everyone sitting there that Jesus is owning these words He is applying them to himself.

*The Spirit, that hovered over the waters of the deep and brought order out of the chaos is speaking to you now through me... I am hear to proclaim good news to the poor who have not made it into this room and the hunger within your own self serving souls...*

*The Spirit is sending me right now to proclaim to you a release from your demons and your struggles, your broken relationships and all that captivates you.*

*Recovering of sight to the blind!*

*To set you free from all that oppresses you!*

*I am here right now proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor!!*

And then he calmly puts away the scroll into its case, gives the scroll back to the jaw-dropped attendant. And then slowly makes his way back to his seat.

Luke says – the eyes of everyone in that room were fixed on Him.

Jesus sits down calmly, brushes the crease of his robe, meets the people's gaze and says:

Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing!

Boom, mic drop!!

And for a moment the people marvel, astonished, agreed that this might possibly be true.

‘God is here speaking to us now, I am being set free... for the first time in a long time I am feeling a sense of optimism... hope! Set free from my struggle to get it right... set free to see what has been before me this whole time, even in my struggle, even in my oppression, even in the political occupation...!!

And then the voice of the Lord continues and Jesus says all that God has to say about our condition. That God would be our God, and let us trust in him but we would rather have it our way, we

would rather be in control... God's Kingdom is at hand and they can not see it.

The doubts creep in, isn't this just a man, *isn't this Joseph's son?*

They are convicted by Jesus words. This crowd that at one point was marveling and astonished at God's proclamation want their chance to argue the point.

They are filled with wrath, that Jesus would imply they do not hear his voice and Jesus was driven out of the synagogue... Luke tells in great detail the crowd who once loved him, for years and years raised him, ceremonially kicked him *out of town*, lead him to the steep hill built to defend the edge of town and where about to *throw him down headlong*.

We can't know if Jesus planned this, or the situation arose, but what we can be certain of is that this moment changed everything. Jesus' ministry began, the year of the Lord's favor was and still is... now!

