

Unconventional Wisdom (Luke 4:23-24): Bible Commentary for the New Baptist Covenant

No doubt it has happened to you. You open your e-mail Inbox and begin to read. You cannot believe what you are seeing. Someone you believe and have experienced to be even-tempered and reasonable has sent you an e-mail message and upon reading it, you find your heart beating faster, your mind puzzled by the attack in the words.

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If you are mentally disciplined or otherwise distracted at that moment, perhaps you will have time to recognize or remind yourself of the limitations of e-mail, or any written word.

E-mailing is similar to conversation and so convenient. But e-mails often written in conversational style create vast chasms of misunderstanding because the tone of voice is not present. The reader/receiver is left to decipher the tone.

Is the person angry or joking? Is the choice of words meant to attack or is the person asking questions needing answers? Are the questions rhetorical or in need of immediate and specific response?

No doubt you have encountered some of these same questions as you approach even familiar texts in Scripture.

The verses receiving focus in this lesson are ripe for misunderstanding or neglect because the absence of clues about the tone in which this collection of sayings is given leaves much room for a variety of interpretations.

Is Jesus picking a fight or responding to accusations the reader doesn't hear? As we work through the larger passage and this particular "hinge" passage, let's

keep in mind the danger of assuming we know the tone of voice.

“Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”

This statement places in Jesus’ own mouth the determination of the messiah as prophet.

He has stood before them and read from the scroll of Isaiah. He has read them beloved words of hope and promise. He is telling them the day of this promise has arrived. And as hometown boy he now makes clear that he is also sage and prophet. He comes using the forms that are familiar to them, proverbs and scripture reading.

And yet he confronts them with his content. Their response, while not as yet described, is shaped by his words as disbelieving. Either he does not expect to be well received, or their response is already becoming evident.

It falls into the pattern of how the prophets of old were received. It places Jesus again within the boundaries and patterns of Judaism. It demonstrates Jesus’ knowledge and understanding of Hebrew history. He knows that God’s messengers have been rejected in the past.

It is in this statement where Jesus begins to focus on what he builds in the next section—the teaching and illustrations that show that familiarity and proximity are often what blinds the people of God to the very work of God.

Primary conflict here isn’t between Jesus’ teachings and Judaism, but between Judaism and its own scriptures.

Jesus reads to them from Isaiah and then shows them how God is enlarging beyond the boundaries they have created and used scripture to shore up.

Conventional wisdom says a physician should be the most well. Conventional wisdom says familiarity breeds contempt. Conventional wisdom says hometown folks know homegrown boys well enough to see through their preaching.

God’s wisdom has something unconventional to bring to God’s people. And those who identify themselves within the religious structures may not be as comfortable with this unconventional force of the spirit in the world as they are with their conventional wisdom.

Luke 4:23-24 functions as two verses with three statements that link the setting of Jesus within the context of Jewish worship and scripture with the message of Jesus to those who believe they have the inside track.

Luke shows us through these verses of Jesus' response to their conventional wisdom that God will not be limited by what "most people think," nor will God's movement be limited by the church's interpretation of the words of the prophets.

God won't be waiting for those "inside" to get the message straight. God will be out among the ones in need of healing, the ones who hear the word of promise in the mouth of God's prophet.

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This column excerpted from a Bible commentary for "The Agenda: 8 Lessons from Luke 4," a free, online study to help prepare churches for next year's New Baptist Covenant Celebration in Atlanta. Belmont University's School of Religion partnered with the Baptist Center Ethics to write the commentaries. The commentary, lessons are other resources are available [here](#).