

JESUS IN HIS HOMETOWN

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Scripture: Luke 4:14-30

Luke 4:14-30

14 Then Jesus returned to Galilee, filled with the Holy Spirit's power. Reports about Him spread quickly through the whole region. **15** He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

16 When He came to the village of Nazareth, His boyhood home, He went as usual to the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read the Scriptures. **17** The scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where this was written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free,

19 and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."

20 He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at Him intently. **21** Then He began to speak to them, "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

22 Everyone spoke well of Him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from His lips. "How can this be?" they asked. "Isn't this Joseph's son?"

23 Then He said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself' – meaning, 'Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.' **24** But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown."

25 "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. **26** Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner – a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. **27** And many in Israel had leprosy in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian."

28 When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. **29** Jumping up, they mobbed Him and forced Him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push Him over the cliff, **30** but He passed right through the crowd and went on His way.

What an interesting passage! We read about sermons and preachers, and sermons that we like or don't like, and sermons that may get us riled up and upset and angry. Most of us have gone through those emotions when we've listened to sermons over the years. But this one really stands out – they were so upset with this sermon that they were willing to take the preacher and throw him over a cliff. That was the kind of situation that Jesus faced in His hometown of Nazareth.

Jesus had just come from the wilderness where He had been led by the Holy Spirit to face the temptations – and He's come through solid. He has overcome Satan and He has won that particular battle. But it also adds in vs.13, "When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, He left Him until the next opportunity came." That's a good word for us as well. As we face Satan and the temptations

that he brings against us, and the allurements, the seductions that come as we have victory over him, we ought not to sit back and say, "Okay, I've won this, and now I don't need to worry." No! Satan goes away but he waits for another opportune time as he did for Jesus – to come back and try to tempt and trip Him and us from the plans and purposes that God has for us.

So Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, comes to Galilee, and reports are flying around about His amazing power, the things that He is doing. He taught regularly in their synagogues and was praised by everyone. And as we look at this whole passage, we can see that there are 4 or 5 clusters of verses that can almost be given a title.

- Prelude: 1:1-13 He's coming off the temptations, so that becomes a prelude,
- The spread of Jesus' fame (vss. 14-15)
- Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth (vss. 16-21)
- The people's response (vs.22)
- Jesus' response to the people's response (vss. 23-27)
- The people's final response (vss. 28-30)

Jesus in the Synagogue in Nazareth

Jesus comes to Nazareth and He goes to the synagogue as was His habit. It looks like growing up, that's where He spent His time every time the synagogue was open. Typically, the synagogue opened on the Sabbath, that would be Saturday, then Monday and Thursday. In those days, all it needed were ten people who could come together to support and take care of it and a synagogue could be formed. That's how the Jews began to worship God after the temple was brought down during the Babylonian conquest.

So, synagogues sprung up everywhere, and Nazareth had a synagogue, and there could have been others, because we know that in Jerusalem there were about 400 synagogues. Typically, on these days, people would come in and there would be teaching, a reading from the Torah and from the prophets. A scroll would be given to people who wanted to read. They would stand up and read, and when they finished, they would sit down. Then they would teach some aspect from that passage.

All this was familiar to Jesus. So, He comes into the synagogue in Nazareth and the scroll of Isaiah the prophet was handed to Him. When you think about that, you begin to see how God's hand was working here in terms of getting His Son into the world as the Messiah, and then giving Him the right opportunities to almost proclaim it as we will see. But I love seeing the fingerprints of God all over this – from all the scrolls of all the prophets, they gave Jesus the scroll of Isaiah. He opens it up to the place where it was written: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, for He has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor, He has sent Me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the Lord's favor has come."* (Isaiah 61:1-2)

The interesting thing here is that Jesus doesn't read the whole passage which goes on to talk about the way of vengeance of the Lord as well. But He stops short of it. The passage goes on to say: *"He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the Lord's favor has come and with it the day of God's anger against their enemies. To all who mourn in Israel, He will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous bless instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the Lord has planted for His own glory. They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them."*

All of this actually has to do with the second coming of Jesus which is why He stopped right here. He stopped with the year of God's favor. He didn't bring in the vengeance which is when He comes the second time as Judge. It seems, beloved, that we are living in this age of the 'comma', the comma

that we find between where Jesus stopped and what the Prophet Isaiah mentioned, but Jesus didn't bring in. that's the age that we live in. Jesus is saying, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me for He has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor.*" This is the Messianic prophecy. Jesus is saying something very important here. In vs. 20 it says, "He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down." Now, till here, it was absolutely typical, and they were waiting for Him to teach on what He has read. Then He says this: "*The scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day.*" In other words, this Messianic prophecy has been fulfilled today. The anointing of God is upon Me to fulfill the role of the Messiah.

The People's Response

Everyone spoke well of Him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from Him lips. This is interesting because when we read vs.22, it says, "*Everybody was amazed at just how wonderfully He spoke.*" And yet, they also say, "Isn't this Joseph's son, the carpenter? He can't be the Messiah. We've seen him grow up."

On one hand, they are amazed at His teaching, and on the other hand, they are critical and cynical of who He is. Amazed at His proclamation but unwilling to accept who He is. When it comes to who He is, they only see Him as Joseph's son – the one who used to live down the street from them, the carpenter. I think this is of great import for us as we look at it through what happened with them. Because while they were waiting for the Messiah, and they were seeing all the signs that Jesus was doing all over the place, and even when He got up and said, "Today this has been fulfilled in your midst," they were not willing to see it.

Jesus' Response to the People

Jesus then says, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself!' meaning, do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum. "But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown." And so Jesus says to them, "I know you want Me to do miracles here like I've done in Capernaum." In other words: you'll quote me this proverb, "Physician, heal thyself," because a physician who doesn't have the ability to heal himself can't be trusted to heal others. This was the underlying meaning. This was what was shouted at Jesus even on the cross. 'He saved others but He cannot save Himself.' Jesus is talking futuristically – You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: Do miracles here in your own hometown like those you did in Capernaum. Then He says, calling Himself a prophet, "But no prophet is accepted in his own hometown."

Then He goes on to say things that, as we look back now from them wanting to throw Him off the cliff, we can begin to understand how this engagement with His hometown people got them so angry. He calls upon two Old Testament prophets and He says, "You remember Elijah and Elisha? You remember during the time when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of the needy widows in the land. Instead, he was sent to a foreigner, a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon." We know that during the time of Elijah, Israel had reached the very pits. They were worshipping all other gods; they had forsaken Yahweh. In spite of the fact that there were many widows in Israel at that time, God didn't ask Elijah to go and minister to any of them. Instead, God told him to go to a Gentile widow in Zarephath, Sidon, Gentile territory, and minister to her. There is a veiled warning here – that if you reject the prophet, God is going to send the prophet elsewhere.

Then He comes back with a second example, and He says, "Look even at the prophet Elisha! There were many lepers in Israel during his time, but he was sent to heal somebody from Syria – Naaman, who was not a Jew or a believer. Again, there's this warning that Jesus is giving – that if you fail to

recognize or accept the prophet's words, those words will go with the prophet somewhere else. God will take those words elsewhere.

The People's Final Response

Of course, when they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. Jumping up, they mobbed Him, and you know the rest of the story.

Applications

Let's leave Nazareth. Let's leave the people there and see what this means for us today, knowing that Jesus is the Messiah. Are we engaging with Him as Messiah? Are we making sure that we go beyond the proclamation that He made to knowing Him as Savior and Lord? Are we following Him, listening to Him and obeying Him? Or are we too enamored with His words and say that they are wonderful words, as many people have said about many of the things that Jesus said. Great ideology! But can we follow all that He said? The people of Nazareth stop short of that. They're willing to say "This is a great proclamation, a great teacher!" but they're not willing to follow.

How about you and me, beloved? Even as we think about some of the things that Jesus read about the Messiah – bringing good news to the poor, good news of salvation. Have we accepted that good news? Captives will be released. When we look at that, we see that Jesus is not just talking physically; there's a spiritual element to it. When Isaiah was the prophet, Israel had already been released from Babylon by the Persian king. So they were not captives anymore in that sense, but they were captives in their minds.

I wonder today, whether you're a captive of something, or you've been blinded by something and you need to see something that's right in front of you, as Jesus was to the people of Nazareth. Or, are you facing some kind of oppression that you need to be freed from? Because this is the day of the Lord's favor. If you have accepted Jesus as Messiah, Savior, Lord of your life, then if these are lingering areas that need the attention of the Messiah, then maybe this is a good day to turn and say, "I'm still captive to somethings. I'm still oppressed by some things and I need a touch from You, because my eyes are not seeing. Whatever it is, beloved, are you willing to take Jesus at face value and follow Him?"

Another question that I'd like for us to deal with is a graver question than the ones that we've been looking at. Paul's letter to the Romans has a very hard edge to what he's saying. In that letter, he addresses a kind of entitled attitude that they had, thinking that as ones who had been grafted into God's plan of salvation and become chosen people and all that we read in 1 Peter 2. Whether they were getting cocky, looking askance at Israel, in a sense. I think this passage would be a good reminder for us to not take the place that we are in as children of God lightly.

Romans 11:17-22

But some of these branches from Abraham's tree – some of the people of Israel – have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree. But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

"Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." Yes, but remember – those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you

do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. For if God did not spare the original branches, He won't spare you either.

Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.

Those are harsh words! It might be a wakeup call for us if we think: Oh, I'm fine. I believe in Jesus. I accept Him into my heart. I'm on this gravy train going to heaven. I don't need to do anything. I love listening to preachers all around the world, or listening to worship teams, and so on. The question is if you have accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord, as your Messiah, one who has come to save the anointed one, then the response, beyond listening to all that, is to follow Him, to heed, to obey Him. Not to sit back and say, "I'm good!"

Paul says, "Be very careful, because if God can do what He did to that branch, what would He do with you as well?" So, there's a seriousness to this passage from our perspective as well. Having accepted Him as Messiah, we now need to be careful that we don't get calloused and cold and lukewarm in our thinking and understanding and engagement with Jesus.

I think this is a good word for us as we begin this period of Lent which is a time of spiritual renewal for us. It's a time where we are saying: Lord, we open ourselves up to You. Show us those areas that need working on. And maybe something in this passage has pricked you and you feel that you need a little bit of realignment. I believe that this is the time. In fact, as we come to the table of our Lord, to come crying out before Him saying: Lord, forgive me for I haven't really got into what You want me to get into. Haven't really followed You. I've been proud of who I am. I need to realign, allow You to reinvent me to follow better. I need to handover to You those things that terrify me, press me, hold me captive. I invite You to talk off the things that blind me. Lord, during this period of Your favor, do some renewing work in me. That's the place, beloved, I'd like for us to be as we come to the table of the Lord.

Shall we pray together?

Holy Father, we come carefully before You, inviting You and giving permission to Your Holy Spirit to dig deep into us and dredge out those things that need to be brought to the surface so that they can be seen for what they are. Then we ask that You would do a cleansing work in us even as we partake of this beautiful memorial that Your Son has given to us that reminds us that we are a redeemed people, cherished by You, bought with a heavy price. We ask, Lord, that You would meet us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.