

The Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

January 31, 2016

**Prayer of the Day:** Lord God, you know that we are surrounded by many dangers and that we often stumble and fall. Strengthen us in body and mind, and bring us safely through all temptations; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

**Verse of the Day:** Alleluia! The Spirit of the Lord is on me; he has anointed me to preach good news. Alleluia! (Luke 4:18)

**Sermon Text:** Luke 4:20-31

Our sermon reading comes from Luke 4:20-30:

(please read)

What went wrong? Just compare this reading's beginning to its ending. Eyes filled with amazement fixate on Jesus. He preaches; those listening label his words as: "kind" and "gracious." Then in the same breath the scene instantly becomes violent. What went wrong?

I mean, you (and I) might expect this reaction. You may expect insults and scoffing and doors slamming whenever you speak about your Savior. But Jesus? Do you expect him to experience this? Better yet, is he not the Son of God, the One who can speak and win hearts? How could people not automatically listen to him?

**Luke 4:20-31**

<sup>20</sup> 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, <sup>21</sup> and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, "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.'"

<sup>24</sup> "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. <sup>27</sup> 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."

<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> 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 down the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

<sup>31</sup> Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. <sup>32</sup> They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

Jesus' sermon does not criticize; he does not preach something randomly off-topic. Instead, you hear quite the opposite: **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *to heal the sin-sick soul, regardless of reception.*

That is the main theme of his sermon. Jesus is back home in Nazareth, sharing a portion of God's Word from Isaiah the prophet. On this particular worship day, his words come to life—literally. Everything Isaiah predicts actually ties together in this person of Jesus. The poor souls craving for just a moment of peace would be lavished with true, everlasting peace. Those chained to lingering shame would be set free. Minds oppressed by crushing, constantly-remembered guilt would be unburdened. True peace with God is here— not by our own choice or actions— but because Jesus comes to bring you peace with God.

**The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him... All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.** The words sound nice and polite and inspirational, but that is it. After all, this is Joseph's son and Joseph is not a Harvard graduate or a Nobel Peace Prize winner. He is a carpenter. Jesus worked with Joseph; he too is a carpenter. So, why listen to him? What makes his message any more special than the message from any other message? What makes Jesus so knowledgeable that the crowds should listen to such a young rabbi? What moves Jesus to think that he knows everything about the Bible, even though he has no formal seminary training? ([John 7:15](#))

Why listen to Jesus? What makes him such a special teacher? I mean, so many want him to prove that he deserves our attention. That is the same thing those Nazareth crowds demanded then. **“Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”** If you have a sore and your doctor prescribes some medication, it would be difficult to trust him if he had the same sore and it was twice as big as yours! You trust your doctor if he can heal his own sickness first. If Jesus calls himself the Son of God, then Jesus ought to do something to prove that he is the Son of God. If only Jesus came down from heaven, performed a miracle and revealed his power to everyone, then people would believe, right? It sounds reasonable until you see that Jesus did do miracles— and news of his power spread throughout the surrounding regions ([Luke 4:14](#)). You wonder, how many more miracles does Jesus need to perform to prove that he is the Son of God? After all, how many miracles have you done?

I mean, Jesus is pretty clear about who he is, what power he has, and what he comes to do. So, why then do the crowds still challenge his identity? Because this is Joseph's son, right? Put another way, this is not the King they had imagined would come. The prophet Isaiah promised freedom for prisoners, release from oppression, and the year of the Lord's favor ([Isaiah 61:1,2](#); [Luke 4:18-19](#)). It made to them that God would send someone to free the Jewish nation from the Roman Empire, give full governmental control to Israel, and fill their lives with blessings. Yet, Jesus' message does not reinforce their thoughts. In fact, the problem is not really with Jesus' words, but rather with what the words actually said.

It shows you how scary the human heart can truly be; it can take the clearest Word of God and reject it for the smallest reason. Sometimes God's Word exposes our failures,

but more than that— it forbids certain thoughts that we might sincerely find acceptable and harmless. When God blesses marriage with a life-long commitment between one man and one woman, our heart might want to say: “Yes... but the world is so different today! Marriage has changed!” When God tells us to guard his teachings and to not tolerate false teaching, our heart may want to say: “Yes... but not everything in the Bible needs to be defended!” When our God tells us to care for one another in selfless Christian love, our heart may wish to say: “Yes... but I have been hurt one too many times and I deserve to hurt others back!”

Jesus gives such clear teachings and still the heart wishes to hear something different. Yet, if hearts stand against what God so clearly says, then the heart also stands against God!

You know, instead of telling us what we want to hear, Jesus tells us what we need to hear. He is the Prophet who preaches God’s good news of forgiveness. He comes to tell you and me how he deals with our sins. Sin deserves punishment— eternal death in hell. It is not overlooked; God does not ignore it. Instead, **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED:** God sends his Son *to heal the sin-sick soul.*

Jesus never rejects the Word of God because he disagrees with it. Instead, he shares its truth, even though it means that he is rejected in his hometown. He clings to its purpose even though his own Jewish nation shout out his death sentence. He follows God’s plan to pay for sin even though it means he dies on the cross for wrongs he did not do! He suffers and dies for the times we stood toe-to-toe with God and felt entitled to reject the Word.

**SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED;** Jesus has *healed the sin-sick soul.* Three days after his death, he comes back to life. He leaves his tomb. He proves that he is the Physician who can be trusted. His death paid our price for sin; his resurrection declares the payment made in full! He rises to declare to you **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *our sin-sick soul is healed!*

Today you can look back and see in its complete entirety what Jesus has done for you. Even when Jesus stands in Nazareth and crowds shout against him, he remains confident that **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *regardless of reception.*

Jesus declares that public reception does not change the meaning of his Word. He uses two very historical events to tell us that. The first: God sends Elijah to a widow’s house during a great and long famine. This widow has no relations to the Jewish nation. She seems to know nothing about the coming Savior. In fact, she appears to be godless non-believer. Yet, God does not send Elijah to one of his own widowed countrymen; he sends Elijah to a city called Zarephath. The second: God sends a leper to Elisha. Not just any ordinary leper— this man is Naaman the Syrian, a commander in the army of Israel’s most hated enemy. Many other “friends of the Jews” would appear as prime candidates to have their skin conditions cleared. Yet, God chooses to heal Israel’s enemy.

The point? During the times of Elijah and Elisha, the nation of Israel had the chance to listen to God’s Word. They had the opportunity to look forward to Jesus’ birth on Christmas Day. They had the privilege to embrace full and free forgiveness in God’s Son.

Yet, they rejected that. They did not want to hear it. Instead, they worshipped a cow-shaped god called “Baal.” So, when the nation of Israel rejected the Word, God shared his Word with others who never heard it before.

So, what goes wrong in Nazareth? Nothing. Jesus shares the Word and the people reject it. Jesus still remains the only way to heaven ([John 14:6](#)). **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *regardless of reception.* Jesus does not try to win the crowds over by making his teachings more politically correct. He does not first ask the people what they want to hear and then repeat their thoughts. Instead, he preaches what must be heard. When he is rejected to the point of death, he walks through the crowd and preaches somewhere else.

In fact, the Word of God has traveled outside of Jewish lands and has somehow reached here, to this city in America, to you—people who live in America. The Word of God has reached your ears and has touched your hearts and has revealed your Savior.

The Word of God still travels throughout the world and even here [in town]. We exist to share the Word of God among ourselves and with others, and to do so faithfully. Some will listen; some will not. Jesus does not say that you must be successful every time you share your faith. He simply tells you to be faithful—to share it truthfully. He does not tell you that your job is to change the heart. Only the Word of God can do that.

Yes, it is not pleasant to hear rejection. No one wants to face ridicule. No one wants to endure insults. Yet, know this: Jesus is rejected too. Think about it: Jesus is rejected in Nazareth. You are not alone when sharing God’s Word does not always go so well. If your children call you superstitious, you are not alone. If your friend openly disagrees with your beliefs, you are not alone. If your neighbor laughs at you, you are not alone. Jesus is rejected too. Yet, **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *regardless of reception.*

I mean, was there something wrong with what Jesus said? Did you find something in Jesus’ teaching that you disagreed with? Did his miracles demonstrate that he is someone else? No, nothing is wrong with his teachings. Instead, he preaches faithfully— and shares his Word with those who dearly needed it.

That is what you do too. You share the Word with those who dearly need it. You pray for others. You have this church building to share with every worshipper. You share your beliefs with others because you understand what is eternally at stake. Pray that the Word works on hearts. Pray that God gives you opportunities and the courage to continue sharing the Word. Pray that people continue having a chance to hear it. Always remember: **SCRIPTURE STANDS FULFILLED!** *to heal the sin-sick soul, regardless of reception.*