

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – February 3, 2019
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 4:21-32

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.** 31) Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. 32) They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

Dear Friends:

Once again, we have come into the presence of the Lord to be warned, encouraged, and uplifted by his word. The opening words of our text were included in the Gospel lesson for last week so they will sound familiar to many of you. Jesus had recently begun his public ministry and when he returned to his hometown of Nazareth; he visited the local place of worship. The synagogue attendants invited Jesus to speak to the worshippers. Jesus carefully opened the scroll he had been given and read words from the book of Isaiah which foretold the coming of the Lord's "anointed one". Then Jesus claimed that he was the one that Isaiah was writing about by saying: **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** Our text reports the reaction of those who heard Jesus speak as it reminds us

Theme: Don't Treat the Word of Jesus Lightly

1. His Word alone offers the salvation we need
2. It is the Word of the Almighty God

Jesus revealed his glory through the message he proclaimed in Nazareth. Those who were gathered for worship heard Jesus preaching good news, proclaiming freedom from the captivity of sin and Satan and announcing God's grace. They were hearing the kind of words Isaiah foretold would be spoken by the promised Savior. What they had just heard was evidence that Isaiah had been speaking about Jesus – the one who was anointed to save sinners from sin and damnation by dying in their place. It was Jesus' hope not just to convince the people in Nazareth to recognize with their minds that he was the one Isaiah was talking about. He wanted to win their hearts. That is what Jesus desires for us as well. He doesn't just want us to say with our mind that he is the promised Savior. He wants his word to work faith in our hearts – faith that will then display itself in our lives by the things we say and do.

The things the people in Nazareth said and did revealed that these people were not convinced and did not believe that Jesus was their Savior. **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.** The people were impressed but couldn't get past

the fact that Jesus was one of their own and so they ended up treating Jesus words lightly – they refused to accept that Word. They wanted to see some miracles like he had done in Capernaum.

Faith comes from hearing not seeing. The word alone offers the salvation we need. On another occasion, Jesus used the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus to remind his listeners of the power of the Word alone. In that parable, a rich man was reminded that, “If his brothers refused to listen to **Moses and the Prophets**, they would not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”

The words that Jesus spoke in the synagogue which the people took so lightly told of God’s love and help for those who deserve only his anger and punishment. We would say that he was telling the people about God’s grace. The Jews spoke well of Jesus and thought that his words sounded good – but immediately they rejected what he was offering them as being too good to be true. This was “their” Jesus-- the one who had grown up in their town -- in the household of Mary and Joseph. You’ve heard the saying, “familiarity breeds contempt.” The people in Nazareth proved the truth of that statement by the way they treated Jesus and his message. They concluded that it simply could not be possible that the promised Savior could come from such humble roots. Jesus was just another human being to them. They saw only what they wanted to see. Unbelief took over in their hearts.

Many today have this very same problem. People are willing to acknowledge that Jesus was a wonderful teacher and a good example for us to follow as we live our lives – but they stop short of calling him the very Son of God who came into the world to set sinners free from the condemnation they deserved because of sin. They recognize that the Bible speaks about Jesus but believe it is a book written by men who might have exaggerated what happened or made other mistakes. They see Christians who talk about receiving blessings from Jesus who don’t appear to be any better off than other people. They may even be poor; they get sick and die so they jump to the false conclusion that they can’t be God’s children. We need to be careful so that we do not let our reason and the outward appearance of things get in the way of our faith in God’s gracious promises.

Faith does not come from seeing! It comes from hearing, as Romans 10:17 reminds us: **Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** Jesus continued to speak his words of warning to the Jews. Jesus continued to reveal his glory as he revealed to them that he knew the thoughts of their hearts. He pointed out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning. Ultimately, he would demonstrate his almighty power to them as a reminder that his Words are the Word of the Almighty God but the people would not believe.

Jesus spoke about the times of Elijah and Elisha to the people in his hometown. Elijah and Elisha lived at a time when God’s people had turned their back on him. The people followed the godless ways of their rulers. The Lord sent his prophets – men like Elijah and Elisha to warn the people and their rulers to turn from their sinful ways. Sadly, the people treated the Words of the Lord lightly so God allowed his people to suffer under his hand – depriving them of his divine blessings. Yet he willingly showed his compassion to individuals like the widow from Zarephath in the region of Sidon who gladly listen to the word of the Lord and happily provided for Elijah during a time of famine and drought by making sure her limited supply of flour and oil never ran out. God even enabled Elijah to call her son back to life from the dead.

It was a young Jewish slave girl who urged her foreign master, Naaman, to seek out the prophet Elisha for healing of his leprosy. In spite of his initial reluctance, Naaman ultimately obeyed the Word of the Lord and was healed.

Jesus wanted the people to understand that those who refuse to believe will miss out on the Lord’s blessings. Those who believe regardless of who they are or where they live are blessed. It’s as if Jesus is

pleading with them and us: “Don’t hurt yourselves by not believing.” You have God’s word – believe what it says about me. That’s the message Jesus so lovingly shared with the Jews who were rejecting him in Nazareth.

In addition to revealing his glory by pointing out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning, Jesus used his power to set aside their sinful plans.

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 down the cliff.

Jesus’ words had struck a nerve with these people. They were insulted when Jesus reminded them that God gives his grace where and when he desires. They didn’t want to hear that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They still wanted to claim God’s favor because of their own merits rather than as a gift of God. Their actions serve as a reminder to us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought but to humble ourselves before God and each other as we thank God for the marvelous gift of his Son to be our Savior.

The Jews in Nazareth did not listen to Jesus and his words of warning. They became angry with Jesus and they let their anger become so fierce that they tried to kill Jesus by pushing him off a high hill. Here we have a warning about the dangers of allowing anger to gain a foothold in our hearts and minds.

In a demonstration of his divine power, our text tells us **that [Jesus] walked right through the crowd and went on his way.** Jesus made use of his divine power at this time because this was not the time, the place, or the way that his Father had chosen for him to lay down his life for the sins of the people. Here we are reminded that God will always accomplish his will.

Once again, Jesus has revealed his word to us. And once, again it’s appropriate for us to ask ourselves a question. How will I react to this message? Will we take his word to heart? Or, will we take it lightly? The answer becomes obvious when we consider that the word alone offers salvation and that Jesus’ words are the Words of the almighty God.

May we heed the warnings against unbelief and sin Jesus has shared with us today! Rely on Jesus as your Savior from sin with the confidence that he will use the power of his Word to keep you faithful to him, to enable you to resist sin, and to protect you from all danger of body and soul. May his word will work faith in your hearts – faith that will then display itself in your lives by the things you say and do. Amen.