

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany – January 31, 2015
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

Pastor Charles Heup

Luke 4:21 – 30

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 fellow believers in Christ:

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 will sound familiar to those of us who were here last week. They were spoken by Jesus in as he visited the local place of worship in his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had just read a lesson from the book of Isaiah which foretold the coming of the promised Savior. Then Jesus explained that he is the one that Isaiah was writing about when he said: **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** Our text reports the reaction of those who heard Jesus speak as it reminds us that

Theme: Jesus Glory Shines as He Deals With Those Who Reject Him.

1. Jesus points out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning.
2. Jesus uses his power to set aside their sinful plans.

Jesus revealed his glory through the message he proclaimed in Nazareth. Those who were there heard Jesus preaching good news, proclaiming freedom from the captivity of sin and Satan and announcing God's grace. They were hearing the message that 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 would save sinners from sin and damnation by dying in their place. It was Jesus hope not just to convince them to recognize with their minds that he was the one Isaiah was talking about but more importantly 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 words that Jesus spoke 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 and that Jesus had something wonderful to offer – but immediately they rejected the offer as being too good to be true. This was Jesus, who grew up in the household of Mary and Joseph in their own town. They concluded that it simply was not possible that the promised Savior could come from such humble roots. He was just another human being to them. They saw only what they wanted to see. Therefore, their unbelief took over in their hearts.

Many today have this very same problem. They 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: **Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.** And so 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 points out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning.

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.'"

If you went to a doctor to get treatment for the cold and the flu and the doctor was just as sick as you are, you'd mostly likely be a bit suspicious if he gave you a prescription and promised that you'd soon be feeling better. After all, if the medicine was so good – you'd expect that the doctor would have used it first and wouldn't be feeling so miserable. This is the way the Jews in Nazareth were thinking about Jesus. They figured that since people were rejecting him since he had grown up there that all he would have to do to help himself was to prove his right and authority to make such high claims for himself by performing miracles like he had done in Capernaum. But, Jesus knew that even that would not melt those hardened hearts.

24) "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. Jesus refused to yield to their demand for additional evidence. They weren't entitled to any special favors just because they were Jews who lived in Nazareth with Jesus. Although they should have been among the first to accept him as the Savior they were allowing their familiarity with him to get in the way. Jesus pointed them to two Old Testament examples to show that God does not extend his grace to people because of who they are or where they live.

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."

In each of those situations the prophets' own people rejected the message which the prophets proclaimed. However, pagans and foreigners believed. During the time of Elijah God sent a drought and a famine to punish his people for rejecting him and turning to the false God, Baal. The people refused to listen to Elijah's calls for repentance. Yet when God sent him to a neighboring country, a heathen widow recognized him as one sent by the one true God and she obeyed his words. She baked him bread with the last of her flour and oil trusting the promise Elijah made to her that she would not go hungry. God was faithful to the promise. Something similar happened at the time of Elisha. Naaman was a foreigner who had a Jewish slave. This slave felt compassion for her master who was suffering from leprosy and told him to go to the prophet. At first Naaman was reluctant to listen to the prophet when he told him to wash in the river Jordan to be cured. However, in the end he believed and listened. Again, God was true to his words. In both of these cases, we see how God took his grace away from the Jews and shared it with others.

Jesus showed that when people don't believe, that they miss out on the blessings the Lord wants to give them. 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 addition to revealing his glory by pointing out the hardness of their hearts as a loving warning, Jesus uses 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 based on 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. Again, 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 glory, 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.

Once again, Jesus has revealed his glory to us. And once again, it's appropriate for us to ask ourselves a question. How will I react to this message? May we heed the warnings against unbelief and sin which Jesus has shared with us today. Let's rely on him as our Savior from sin with the confidence that he will use the power of his Word to keep us faithful to him, to enable us to resist sin, and to protect us from all danger of body and soul. Let us pray that his word will work faith in our hearts – faith that will then display itself in our lives by the things we say and do. Amen.