

TRINITY

BIBLE CHURCH DALLAS

The Sermon

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Luke 4:22-30

"Jesus Confronts Unbelief"

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TRANSCRIPT

So, I want you to take your Bible and turn with me to the gospel of Luke, Luke chapter 4. Today we're looking at verses 22 to 30, and we're really picking up in the middle of a narrative that began last time in verse 16, but I'm going to begin my reading in verse 22 because this is where we left it off last time.

Jesus has returned to His hometown. He's one year into His public ministry, and this actually inaugurates His great Galilean ministry which will occupy the next year and a half of His life. The first year of His public ministry was in the south in Judea. He has now transitioned north to the area west of the Sea of Galilee known as His Galilean ministry, and it is His most popular time of ministry. They will try to make Him king while He is here in the north, and so He returns to His hometown of Nazareth, that's where He grew up. And He goes into the synagogue and He takes the scroll of Isaiah, which was this opportunity afforded to a traveling teacher to minister the word of God to them. I've had this privilege afforded to me as I travel in different places.

And so He reads Isaiah 61:1-2, which is well known as a messianic passage: "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me, for the Lord is anointed Me to preach, to proclaim liberty to the captives," et cetera, "to the poor." And He hands the scroll back to the assistant and says, "Today this has been

fulfilled in your ears." It was stunning. He's claiming to be the Messiah, this hometown boy. "We know Your parents. We've seen You grow up. You're the Messiah?"

So we pick up the reading in verse 22: "And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?' And He said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'" And He said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.' And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way." What an astonishing passage.

[Prayer] Father, we pray that as we look at this text today You will give us insight and understanding, application. Weave this into the fiber of our soul. Help us to take from this what we should know. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. [End]

In these verses which I have just read we see the after-effect of the response of the people to the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ in the synagogue. Jesus has just read Isaiah 61:1-2 in which He describes how the ministry of the Holy Spirit will rest upon the prophet, preacher, as he ministers the word of God to preach the gospel, and it will be by the ministry of the Holy Spirit that there will be fruit, that there will be any success to cause those who are poor to come under the conviction of their sin and see the bankruptcy of their soul, that those who are imprisoned in sin would see their bondage and seek to be released, that by the preaching of the gospel,

those who are spiritually blind would have the light of truth shined into their darkened soul, and that those who are oppressed by their sin would find rest and comfort in the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This is what the gospel brings to the sinner; and yet at the same time, this passage that is found in verses 18 and 19 is a messianic text. It finds its fulfillment not just in any prophet and not just in any preacher, but in the Messiah Himself. Just to remind you, the word "Messiah" means the Anointed One. The word "Christ" means the Anointed One. It is the Messiah who is the Christ who will be drenched and soaked with the presence and the power of the Person of the Holy Spirit. He will come under the deluge of the Spirit's power upon His life and upon His ministry. And Jesus has just said to them that "I am the fulfillment of this messianic passage. I am the One of whom this text speaks. I am the long-awaited Meshua, Messiah standing in your midst.

So, how will the people respond? How would you have responded? Will they believe the gospel that He has come to preach? Will they receive Him? Will they follow Him? Will they confess their spiritual poverty and their spiritual blindness and their spiritual imprisonment? Will they embrace Him and this gospel that He has come to proclaim? How will they respond? If any group of people ever had the truth presented to them in such a direct and personal way it is this group right here. They have not only the message, they have the Messiah in their very midst. So let's see how they respond.

In verse 22, I want you to see "the admiration of Jesus," the admiration they had. Verse 22, "And all were speaking well of Him," not well of what He said, well of Him. They were speaking favorably of their hometown boy. They were impressed with Him with His speaking ability and wondering at the gracious words. They were dazzled that one of their own could stand up and read the Scripture like this and present it with such penetrating words. They marveled. They were in awe of His speaking ability and how He was able to uplift them with His words.

This is just like what they would say later in John 7:46, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks." And Luke wanting us to understand, just how beautiful were His words that he writes next, "which we're falling from His lips." It was like honey from the honeycomb just falling from His lips, flowing as from a fountain.

And the stress here is not on what Jesus said, but how He said it. They were just stunned at how well He could speak, how well He could teach, how well He could marshal His argument, and they were saying, as if scratching their head, "Is this not Joseph's son? How did He become so good? Who taught Him this? He's so confident. He's so capable. Is this really Joseph's son, Joseph and Mary who lived right here in their midst, Jesus who had grown up in their midst?"

And the framing of the question, "Is this not Joseph's son?" anticipates a positive answer. It's really a statement: "Yes, this is Joseph's son." And what we learn here, it's not enough to speak well of Jesus, it's not enough to speak well of how well He can speak, it's not enough to marvel at the Sermon on the Mount and the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and the morality and the parables that He can tell and the allegories that He can paint, the command of the Old Testament that He has. It's not enough to tip your hat to Jesus and affirm what beautiful words He can speak.

The same reaction occurs today on a constant basis. People are often so caught up with the speaking ability of a preacher, his winsome personality, his charismatic personality, his commanding presence, the tone of his voice, that they lose sight of the message itself or the lack thereof. They lose sight of the doctrine that he teaches or, rather, the lack of doctrine that comes out. And so he becomes something of a celebrity pastor who has a magnetic pull to people because of how gregarious he is and how gifted he is at speech.

And it may even be in a smaller church that people are connected to the pastor, they're just not connected to the Lord, because Brother Bob was there when Momma died, and because Brother Bob comes by the house and

has a meal with us, and because Brother Bob has been the family friend for so long that we just love Brother Bob. But Brother Bob may not be a gospel preacher. And even if he is, there are many who don't know the Lord, they just know Brother Bob and they speak so highly of Brother Bob, and yet they do not know the Lord. And that is exactly what is taking place here. They have bouquets of praise about Jesus' speaking ability, but they totally miss the message itself. They're more attached to the messenger than they are to the message.

It was true in Jesus' day, it is true in our day, people in many places. And many times it's large megachurches. They're more swept up in the manner of the presentation rather than in the content of the doctrine and the theology that is being presented. And ask them, "What did he preach on?" by the time they get to the parking lot, they can't even answer the question. It's just it was a wow factor. They were swept off their feet. It was so exciting to be there. "What did he preach on?" "Well, I'll have to think about it. It was a great show, and it was a great time." That's the appreciation of Jesus. He doesn't want your appreciation, He wants your adoration, He wants your submission.

But notice, second, "the perception by Jesus," in verse 23, because Jesus saw right through them into their souls. He read them like an open book, He always does. In verse 23, "And He said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician, heal yourself!'" Now, this was a well-known saying in this day, "Physician, heal yourself." And Jesus is pulling back the veil of their forehead and He's able to read their mind what they are processing. They are saying such glorious things about Him with their lips, but He knows what's going on in their mind and in their heart.

"Physician, heal yourself," which means, "Why don't you take a dose of your own medicine? Why don't you mind your own business? Who do you think you are to tell us how to live? Why don't you tend to your own life? Why don't you start with yourself? You go first. You need the gospel. You need to acknowledge that you're poor in spirit. You need to acknowledge that you're spiritually blind. You need to acknowledge that you are

spiritually oppressed and that you are spiritually enslaved to sin. Physician, heal yourself! Get out of our face. Give me space."

And then Jesus said that they say, "Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum," - Jesus is saying what they are thinking and what they are saying - "Whenever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well." What they're saying is, "We're not going to believe until You give us proof, until You perform miracles." They are miracle mongers. The word of God is not enough for them. And in Capernaum, Jesus had performed many miracles. So they're saying, "Well, if you're more than Joseph's son, give us a sign here in Nazareth as you did in Capernaum. Prove that you are the fulfillment of Isaiah by performing miracles."

This is how unbelief speaks. It's never enough. The word of God is never enough for unbelief. They always have to have a sign. They always have to have a miracle. They always have to have some little set of circumstances that, "God, if you're really there, God, if you really are real, then cause this to happen. And if You cause this to happen, then I'll believe that You're there. But until then, just Your word is not enough for me." It's nothing but unbelief.

And the fact of the matter is Jesus could have stacked up miracles from here to the moon and they still wouldn't have believed. It would only have hardened their hearts even more because their hearts were already hard. They don't have a head problem, they have a heart problem. They don't need any more information. Their problem is not mental, their problem is spiritual. And the same problem plagues so many today. It's not a lack of information, it's a lack of submission to the information they have. The thief on the cross didn't sit through a series of expository sermons, he had enough to be saved.

And I wonder if that's not true with many of our youth. They've been dragging them to church for years, "We're coming to church and sit under the preaching of the word of God," and they still are in no man's land. I mean, how much more information do you need? You've had a seminary

education as a youth sitting under the preaching the word of God. And there may even have been catechism classes. You know more than most preachers. What's it going to take for you to get committed to Christ? Well certainly, not more information. It's not a head problem, it's a heart problem.

So in verse 24, we see, "the confrontation by Jesus." Jesus now addresses their problem. "And He said, 'Truly I say to you,' - which always introduces an important statement that rises to a very high level, and it has an emphatic, even dogmatic, tone to it - 'Truly, I say to you,' - the word "truly" actually is the word "amen" in the original language, amen if you're a Presbyterian - 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown.'" I mean, how sad is that?

Two things to draw from this. Number one, Jesus sees Himself as a prophet. Does He not? He sees Him as the mouthpiece for His Father in heaven. And He will tell us throughout John's gospel that "the words that I speak are not My words, but the words of Him who sent Me." And Deuteronomy 18:15, Moses spoke of the greatest prophet who is yet to come, the great Prophet. And Jesus is the fulfillment of Deuteronomy 18:15. He is the greatest prophet of all the prophets. He is the greatest preacher of all the preachers. He is the greatest expositor of the law that He Himself gave.

So He, by saying, "No prophet is welcome in his hometown," He knows that He is sent by God to preach the word of God. He's the great Prophet. And second, "He realizes that He's not welcome here," that He's not welcome in his own home, not because of their lack of social graces, but because of their lack of gospel belief.

And so He now doubles down, and in verse 25 He says, "But I say to you in truth," that's almost like repeating again, "Truly I say to you." This now signals the importance of what He is about to say. So it's just back-to-back. "Truly I say to you, I say to you in truth," and Jesus will now give two examples - one from a situation dealing with Elijah, another prophet in verses 25 and 26; and then Elisha, another prophet in verse 27. And in both cases, in both of these examples, it involves a prophet who is unwelcomed

in Israel, who has to go outside of Israel to find a Gentile in order to find a reception for their message. There was no reception in Israel. They will have to go to a Gentile on foreign soil to find a reception.

And so the first example is in verses 25 and 26: "There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah." Of course, there were many widows, there's always many widows. There are always those precious wives who outlive their husbands. That's true of every generation. Of course, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah. And Elijah was a powerful prophet who preached during the reign of King Ahab, one of the most wicked kings of all Israel. And Ahab – just to remind you, was married to Jezebel. I mean, she was a worshiper of Baal. I mean, they could have been President of the United States.

"And it was during those days that the sky was shut up for three years and six months," meaning it did not rain, and it was the judgment of God upon the land to bring this natural disaster and catastrophe and just to dry up the water and to seal the heavens, and there would be no rain. And it came from the hand of God Himself because Israel had rejected her prophets, Israel had despised her prophets, Israel had even killed her prophets, and God turned the spigot off, "And you will have no rain whatsoever for 42 months." And it really makes you wonder with some of the natural catastrophes that are going on; we don't have a climate, whatever, problem, we have a spiritual problem, we have a God problem, and we think we can solve it by creating more problems.

And this is what was happening. It was a severe judgment that came down hard upon the land of Israel. And yet, verse 26, "Elijah was sent." Just to bring this to your attention, this verb "was sent," you'll notice in the passive voice. He didn't send himself, he was sent. It's called a divine passive, meaning it was God who sent Elijah.

Though the name God is not mentioned here, it's clearly implied: "Elijah was sent" – the sender was God – "to none of them" – to none of the widows in Israel. They too had rejected the word of God. And they too were

suffering because their husbands when they had been alive had rejected the word of God, and their leaders had rejected the word of God, and the rest of the nation had rejected the word of God. They're in the same boat with everybody else. Just because they're a nice little widow doesn't mean that they get to live in special conditions someplace over here on an island.

No, Elijah, with the truth, was sent to none of them. And that is the greatest judgment of God. It is when God no longer sends prophets, and when God withholds His preachers. In Amos 8, that judgment where God says through the prophet, "I'm sending a famine in the land," not a famine of food or water, but the severest famine that God can send any nation. It is a famine for the hearing of the word of the Lord.

And you know what the fulfillment of that was? You will not hear your preachers and you will not hear your prophets while they are preaching to you. The fulfillment of this is God says, "I'm going to send you to a land where you will never hear another preacher again, and they're going to preach in a language you don't even understand. I'm going to bring the Assyrians down. I'm going to put a hook in their jaw and I'm going to bring them down into the land, and they are going to pillage and take captive your nation and take you up to Assyria. And there are no prophets up there, and they speak a language that you don't even understand." It is the greatest judgment of God.

And I wonder if there are not elements of the judgment of God on our country right now, as mainline denominations have fallen off the cliff of orthodoxy and are in the pit of liberalism and universalism and agnosticism. And it's a part of the judgment of God, because back in the 1920s and the 1930s, you wouldn't listen, and there's this building effect until it steamrolls its way to our present day. And no matter what town I fly to anywhere, people come up to me and tell me how far they have to drive to find a Bible preacher.

You know what's the result of it? It's the judgment of God on America. This is a long way from what de Tocqueville said, as he came in the 19th century

to America, the French philosopher, to look for the greatness of America. Do you recall that quote? He says, "I look for the greatness of America in her commodious harbors and in her industrial factories, and I did not find the greatness of America. I went into her large cities and the enterprise there, and I did not find the greatness of America there. It was not until I went into her church houses and I heard her pulpits ablaze with righteousness did I understand the greatness of America. America is great because America is good; and if America ever ceases to be good, America will cease to be great." We are living in this.

"Elijah was sent to none of them," - they had crossed the line with God, God had unplugged the truth - "but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow." God just bypassed Jerusalem. God just bypassed the power structure of Israel. God just bypassed the land and swept over like a cloud being moved over the land. Elijah was sent out of the country to Zarephath, which is a tiny, small Phoenician town on the Mediterranean coast about seven miles south of the city of Sidon. It was where Baal worship was performed. It was in a territory controlled by Ahab's father-in-law Ethbaal. He was even named after Baal. And it was really the sovereign finger of God that pointed out this one little widow in the land of Zarephath in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow. Time doesn't permit us to turn to it - and it's in 1 Kings 17:9-24. And what drew the favor of God is this little widow woman was down to the last little cup of flour and last little cup of water, and she has nothing to live on. And the prophet says, "Make me something to eat. Feed me first. You and your dying son can go last."

In reality, it was a test. And this little woman humbled herself to the prophet and obeyed the word of the prophet, and she gave the last of what she had to the man of God. And that little empty cup where the bread flour had been, in that little empty cup where the water had been, began to be filled supernaturally by God because she humbled herself. And the message to Nazareth was loud and clear: "You need to humble yourself and eat out of the hand of the prophet the truth of the word of God if your heart is to be filled to overflowing."

Then Jesus gives a second illustration in verse 27. He moves from Elijah to Elisha: "And there were many lepers in Israel," many who suffered with this skin disease that eats away at a person's body until their fingers just fall off the palm of their hand, and then their palm falls off, their nose falls off, their ears fall off. And they were considered to be ceremonially unclean, and they were unable to enter even a public setting without having to announce their arrival by saying, "Unclean, unclean," to sound a warning to everyone to whom they would be exposed. And there were many lepers in Israel who suffered. And leprosy is a picture of the spiritual disease of sin that kills and causes a person to perish eternally.

There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet. He was the successor of Elijah. You remember, he asked for a double portion of the Spirit of God to be upon him as Elijah ascended to heaven in a chariot of fire, and Elijah's mantle fell upon Elisha, and a double portion of God's Spirit rested upon him just as the Spirit of God had descended and rested upon Jesus Christ in His anointing in the River Jordan.

And we read, "and none of them was cleansed." Again, it's another divine passive, meaning they were not cleansed by God, they were passed over by God and left in their condition. "I will have mercy upon whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion upon whom I will have compassion, and I will harden whom I will harden." It's the sovereignty of God. And so God just leaves all these lepers as they are, in their leprosy, in their sin.

Verse 27 concludes, "but only Naaman the Syrian." This story is found in 2 Kings 5:1-4. I wish I had the time to read it and walk through it. But Naaman, again, was an outsider to Israel. He was a Gentile and he was a Syrian, as this says, one of the enemies of the nation Israel. He was a military commander of the enemy. I mean, this is outside the camp.

And Naaman was told by Elisha that he could be healed of his leprosy if he bathed in the Jordan River. And Naaman was too prideful to go do it. "That's too simple. You'll bathe in the Jordan River and all my leprosy will be gone?" And those around Naaman said, "If the prophet, if the man of

God had asked you to do something hard, something profound, something complicated, you would have done it. But he asked you to do just this one simple, little thing, and you have refused to do it."

And it really was an indication of the arrogance and the pride and the stubbornness that was in Naaman. But he relented and he repented and he humbled himself and he said he would do it. And so he waded out into the Jordan River and immersed himself seven times as the prophet had required, and when he came up out of the water, he was cleansed of all his leprosy because he humbled himself and obeyed the word of the prophet.

The message to the hometown people in Nazareth was abundantly clear. It was painfully clear, that "until you humble yourself, you will remain in your spiritual leprosy. Until you humble yourself, you will remain in famine conditions." And to humble yourself is just a simple thing: "Repent of your sin and believe in Me." They wouldn't do it because they were too stinking prideful. "Physician, heal Yourself. You're the one who's gone mad. You are the one who is mentally sick standing in front of us and claiming to be the Messiah.

So, verse 28, "the indignation against Jesus." There is no indignation that compares to a religious crowd. This goes beyond politics. This goes beyond finances. There is no rage that can be brewed in a human heart that even rises to the level of hatred except within a religious crowd that is unconverted.

So, verse 28, "All the people in the synagogue" - it wasn't just the attendant, it wasn't just the leader, it wasn't just a couple of the men. No, top to bottom, across the board - "All the people in the synagogue were filled with rage." They were in the grip of rage. They were controlled by rage. And the word "rage" here, *thumos*, it means heated anger. "They were infuriated as they heard these things." What things? They are spiritually poor and blind and enslaved and oppressed, and they must humble themselves in order to receive the salvation that God alone can give. They

were spitting mad at the gospel from the greatest evangelist who has ever lived. How blind can blind be?

And it says in verse 29, "They got up" - in other words to rush Him bodily, to lay hold of Him - " and drove Him out of the city." This verb "drove," *ekballo*, it's used of performing an exorcism of casting a demon out of a person. They cast Him out of their town as though they were casting a demon out of town: "Get out of here, don't ever come back!"

"They drove Him out of the city," - they couldn't bear to hear Him preach the truth any longer - "and led to the brow of the hill." The word "brow" here, literally I looked it up, it means an eyelash, just a thin little line. They led Him to the last 1/16th of an inch of a cliff. They took Him to the very edge where there is not an inch left or He goes over the cliff. And "led to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff." Not just push Him down. Do you see this? Throw Him down, slam dunk Him down, so that He will hit the rocks with full force, so that His skull will break open, that His life's blood will be splattered everywhere.

And this is what you do when the sin of blasphemy has been committed. Two or three witnesses are to take stones and they are to stone the person to death or push them off of a cliff. Oh, they got the message. This wasn't a matter of semantics. "You say You're the Messiah? Then we're under obligation to stone You to death, to kill You." This is what unbelief does when it hears the truth. It seeks to kill the messenger in order to get rid of the message.

It's been well said, "The same sun that melts the snow, hardens the clay." It's an amazing thing. I've had people, after I preach, either want to come up and hug me and kiss me, or come up and literally slug me. I've had to have bodyguards to get me out of Sunday school classes so the women would not slug me, literally. Here with Jesus, it is multiplied 10,000 times 10,000 times 10,000. Oh, the depravity of the human heart.

So finally, verse 30, "the preservation of Jesus." Verse 30, this is unbelievable: "But passing through their midst." This verb "passing through" is used when Jesus speaks of a camel trying to pass through the eye of a needle. It's used of a sword piercing through the outer body. It's used of a ship crossing the Sea of Galilee. As Jesus is standing on the edge of the cliff, they are within a millisecond of just pushing Him and throwing Him down. The invisible hand of God provides the way of escape, and somehow some way, not told to us because we don't need to know how. We would be so caught up in the triviality of how that we would miss what is most important, the mere fact that it wasn't His hour yet, it was not yet His time, and He was supernaturally, sovereignly preserved by God the Father and the Holy Spirit. And it concludes, "He went His way."

George Whitefield once said, "We are immortal until our work on earth is finished." I am, you are immortal until your work on earth is finished. I give myself to the best physical care I can. I have a concierge doctor. I have two annual checkups. I go to so many other doctors just to try to stay as healthy as I can. But the fact of the matter is, over it all is the sovereignty of God. "And all my days are written in His book when as yet there was not one of them," Psalm 139. "And my days will not exceed the limit," Job 14:5. "We must do the work of Him who sent us while it is day; night is coming when no man can work," John 9:4.

We are immortal until our work here is finished. We are untouchable until our work is finished. And the same hand of God that was upon Jesus is upon your life as well. I have thought about the providence of God in my life, the times my life has been spared. It's just the invisible hand of God that keeps us alive, that keeps you alive. And as long as you are here on this earth, you have work to do; and when your work is finished, He will bring you home. And only He knows how much work you have left to do.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for this passage. What a wild, almost bizarre scene this is. It's really hard to do it justice. There's so much more that I need to say, but have not the time. Cause us to continue to think about these verses, meditate upon these verses, give thought to these verses. Thank You

for working in our hearts, that we have not responded like those in Nazareth. There but for the grace of God go I, we would have been a part of that sneering, jeering crowd that day that would've gotten up and tried to push Him, throw Him off a cliff. Thank you that You've softened our hearts. I pray this in Christ's name. Amen.