

Hometown Preaching

Reading & Text: Luke 4:14-30

Beloved in Christ, we live in a day of deep divisions in society. People are offended easily, and at the same time it is regarded as unethical, even illegal to offend someone--if that someone is regarded by society as being under-privileged.

After decades of Christian norms so established in the structures of North American society and having been able to enjoy our freedoms and peace, it might seem that now we coming to an age like none before. But we know there always have been deep divides. There is a divide that stretches from one end of society to the other, from one end of time to the other--the divide between those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and who do not.

This divide we see here in our text. We see why it is, on what side we must be found, and what we should expect. Jesus came to His own and His own did not receive Him.

1. The Presentation of the Messiah

We are here looking at Jesus just at the start of His public ministry. But this is not the first event after coming from the wilderness. Vs. 14-15, tell us that Jesus went first to Galilee. A number of events happened there: calling His disciples, healing the sick, perhaps even His sermon on the Mount. Matt. 4:25: *Great multitudes followed Him—from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.* This agrees with Luke's comment that Jesus *was glorified by all* (15).

From Galilee he went south and west to Nazareth, to his hometown. How does He present Himself to His hometown folk? Does He believe He is who we believe Him to be? Does He come there as simply another good minister? Luke makes a point of telling us that Jesus is Spirit-indwelt. The Holy Spirit descended on Him at baptism and then led Him into the wilderness. By this Spirit He enters ministry: *in the power of the Spirit of God* (14). This is an important requirement to being the Son of God who does the will of the Father.

Jesus went to their synagogues in Galilee, and here He goes to the synagogue of the Jews in Nazareth on the Sabbath. This was His custom (16). Christ is an example to us by spending the Lord's Day with His people in worship.

Jesus reads Isaiah 61:1-2 and with all eyes on Him and then He preaches: *"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* These verses from Isaiah are a claim to being the Messiah. The Jewish Messiah was one whom the Jews anticipated, based on the promises God had given them. But they got the idea of the Messiah mixed up so they did not look for the right kind of Messiah. They looked for one who would free the Jews from Rome's rule, and one who would bring fame and riches to their country.

But here in this passage it says *the Spirit is upon Me*. The prophet is saying He was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord *to preach the gospel, the good news to the poor*. Jesus comes to save those in dire need. He comes to the *broken-hearted*. It is not His purpose to raise your social standing, to get your political party elected, or to give you a financially secure retirement.

He did come to help the poor and the suffering, but His focus of ministry was upon the spiritual state of the heart--slavery to sin and our guilt before God. The good news that Isaiah brought was to Israel who was under God's judgment for her rebellion against God. Jerusalem suffered in exile, but the good news is that God sets free the captives. To those stung by the backlash of their sin and the hand of an angry God, Jesus says, *I have good news. I am setting you free.* So hear Him, believe Him, receive Him!

But Jesus did not just preach this good news: He said *Today, this is fulfilled. This is the acceptable year of the Lord*--the time of salvation. Jesus was saying: *The Scriptures are fulfilled in Me*. He knew who He was. He is God's Word in the flesh. He's not just a good teacher, He is the righteousness and grace of God that saves sinners, through His blood offered on the cross. How do you think of this Jesus?

2. The Prophecy of the Messiah

The people's response seems positive. They listen and marvel at His *words of grace* (22). They say among themselves, *Is not this the son of Joseph?* (22) But Jesus' answer makes clear they are not answering with humble faith. He answers, *You will say Physician heal yourself* (23).

In Mark's account of this same situation (Mark 6) their question (*Is this not the son of Joseph?*) arises from their being offended by Jesus. Their offence seems to be the connection of their familiarity with Jesus and His Messianic authority. *He is the Son of Joseph, having grown up on that street. He just like one of us!*

Christ says they will say *Physician, heal yourself*, while asking that the signs that He *did in Capernaum, do here in Nazareth* (23). They will be saying: *Heal your own people, not just those in Capernaum!* They yearn for Christ's miracles and works. But receiving His Word and believing that He is the One sent from God, is much different than wanting to be spectators of miracles. They are unwilling to fear and worship Him.

Many people today say, *If God saved everyone suffering from these tragedies, if Jesus healed me of my disease I would believe. If He simply did this or that*. There is that selfish desire in us to put God to our own test. We too, perhaps believe in Him only because He serves my comfort, because He'll keep my family together. But do you believe Him for who He is?

Jesus said *No prophet is accepted in His own country* (24). These people of Nazareth (Nazarenes) will not accept Him as prophet. He gives two examples. During Elijah's day, Israel was under God's judgment for their rebellion--under a great famine for 3 and half years. The long length emphasizes Israel's hardness of heart--even after years they would not yield. Elijah, the servant of God whose prayer caused the heavens to stop raining, he was not sent to any in Israel but to a widow in Zaraphath. Elijah was not sent to any others because he was not wanted by God's people. The next example strengthens the same point. Many lepers in Israel at the time of Elisha, but none of them were healed. But Namaan the Syrian, was healed in the Jordan river--in Israelite waters!

The point with these prophets is that Israel would not receive them. Even though they were servants sent by God to bring His message and works of grace, yet Israel would not receive God, and so God did not give His works of grace to His own covenant people but to strangers. The point is not that God is stingy with His grace--as if He would not give any to Israel. No, it is that His own people had hearts that were closed. Why is that, do you think? What warning should we take?

Is it not because of the sinful tendency of our hearts, to take for granted the covenant grace that has been given to us by God? We easily focus on many religious customs, and meantime we forget that behind the favour of God and its blessings was Christ's precious blood and God's costly grace for us sinners!

The Nazarenes are infuriated. They seize Jesus, cast Him out of the city, and then drag Him to the brow of the hill. It all looks like His road to Golgotha. When unbelieving hearts are exposed, they wage war upon Jesus Christ and oppose His ministry. From the bottom of their hearts, they reject Jesus. The prophet has spoken and it comes true.

But should they have responded to His warnings, and how must we? Jesus rightly offends even His covenant people by peeling back the pleasantries and civilities and exposing our self-righteousness. He sees what is there in the heart, and He will not with only words of grace, cover over the shades of unbelief, arrogance, and ritualism. We must come with humble faith! Acknowledge your sin, and your desperate need to be saved from sin! We must confess our unthankful familiarity with His covenant of grace. We must let go of our excuses and pride, and make room for Jesus of Nazareth.

3. The Passing of the Messiah

Jesus came to His own and His own did not receive Him. He is about to be cast down from the cliff. But He is not because He is the Son of God, having authority over these people. He is not thrown, because it is not His time. He is not, because just as He would not take an easy route to escape the sufferings of the cross when Satan tempted Him to cast Himself off the temple, so also here, even by the hands of His own people, He will not take this easier route.

(30) *Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.* He passes through them. They are frozen, unable to move one limb in order to carry out their plan, while He walks right through them. What is Christ telling them? Is it that He just simply moves on to other activities, to other people, to other cities?

He does pass through, and He moves on to Capernaum, to those who were regarded as lesser among the Jews. But in so doing, He leaves these in Nazareth behind. He gives them over to the stubbornness of their hearts. We read in passages after Luke 4 of Nazareth as the city where Jesus came from. In Acts, the early Church referred to Jesus often as Jesus of Nazareth. Early followers of Christ are even called *Nazarenes* (Acts 24:5). Yet we never hear of Jesus or the apostles visiting Nazareth again. They reject the Lord and the Lord rejects them. He moves on and passes them by.

See how the Lord is offended by sinners who remain offended at Him. Let it not be said of us, *The Lord visited us but hearing Him we would not yield, and our hearts remained set in our sinful ways.* Of course, the offer for forgiveness and grace remained open for these in Nazareth while they lived. If they will but turn from their sin, they will find a Saviour whose arms are open. So too for us.

When we hear the Word faithful preached, we are each time confronted with Jesus. Are we here to hear good words? To listen to a good sermon but not to be changed? To be observers? Let us not just be hearers of the Word but doers. Amen.