

The Messiah Confronts His People, Part 1

Luke 4:22-30

You'll notice in Luke 4 verses 14 to 16, the scene is set there in the synagogue. The synagogue was the place of weekly Jewish worship and instruction. The synagogues were ready-made venues for this purpose to introduce the Messiah to the Jewish people. God, during the time of the exile in Babylon, in the sixth century BC, he raised up these synagogues to be really centers of Jewish instruction. Jewish people, they gathered there in foreign lands to retain their Jewish heritage and culture, and they did that by reciting the writings of Moses and the prophets; they may have been trying to hold on to their culture, their identity, but God's design was to prepare his people to see their Messiah.

All during that 400 years of prophetic silence, between the prophet Malachi all the way to the birth of Christ, that entire 400 years was intended to keep people looking down at their Bibles so that when the Messiah finally arrived, they would look

up from the pages of Scripture, see the one about whom they had read, recognize him for who he really is.

So, did they recognize him? Did they see him for who he really is? They were certainly looking at him. Look at verse 20, it says there at the end that their eyes were fixed on him. The verb used there is *atēnizō*. It's to stare at him, to look intently. These people are on the edges of their seats after Jesus reads that Scripture in their midst. They are extremely curious about him, having heard the reports. You could hear a pin drop in that place. But did they really see him? They were looking at him, sure, practically boring holes into his body with their eyes. But did they actually see what God intended them to see?

When we read Luke 4:22, we have the answer to that question. Jesus had just read from the prophet Isaiah, it's text that announced himself as the Messiah, a text that explained his Messianic mission, and then this in verse 22, "And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, 'Is this not Joseph's son?'" Folks, that right there, that is the turning point in this narrative, that's the hinge, the pivot point.

Their response is really what precipitates everything that happens in the rest of the narrative, first from Jesus and then from the people in the synagogue. That verse explains what, frankly, doesn't seem to us to make too much sense. How is it started so well, how did it turn out to be so dangerous for the very one who came to provide salvation?

That's what we're going to take our time to understand today. We're going to go through this text and figure out how it is that these people could see but not understand. How could they hear all that he said that day and then not fall down immediately and worship him as their gracious redeemer? This is a classic case of, so close, yet so far away. Speaking well of Jesus on the one hand, attempting to murder him within the same hour. It really is incredible, isn't it? This text tells us not only what happened that day, but why it happened as well.

I just mentioned God's gracious providence raising up the synagogues during the Babylonian captivity. He'd been instructing the people for centuries, from ancient generations, as James put it in Acts 15, all from Moses and the prophets, that is a mark there of gracious preparation of God, right? But beyond that you can see several indications in this text, this is going to be the first point in our outline. We see God's

gracious preparation of these people and I want you to see this clearly here because it really does heighten the contrast between what God had done to prepare Nazareth and what Nazareth had done to reject God's grace. It's truly an amazing contrast. Notice, first of all in verse 16 that Jesus came home to Nazareth where he'd been brought up.

Before Jesus arrived in Nazareth, Nazareth had received reports about Jesus, verse 14, so they knew he was not the same quiet, unassuming son of a carpenter who left Nazareth a year, year and a half ago. He's a different man. It's hard to see people in a new light, isn't it? Someone from your hometown, someone you've known all your life, they go away. God uses them in unique ways, gives them unique experiences, they return home. It's hard not to see them as you always did when they were growing up in your midst, isn't it? And I'm sure on a human level that was part of the struggle for the people in Nazareth, just to see Jesus in a different light. That's why God prepared them.

That's why God made sure that the reports about Jesus had made it back to Nazareth way ahead of his arrival there. He even gave them time to process what they had heard, to ponder it, probably a year's time to think about it. So, when Jesus

returned home to Nazareth, he was not an unknown figure as the Messiah; he was known. People had heard the news, they knew the reports from Judea, his miracles, his authority, his teaching. They had never heard of anybody like this. Never heard of any of these kinds of things happening. His reputation preceded him, which was part of God's gracious preparation.

Here's a second indication of God's grace. When Jesus finally arrived in Nazareth, God, right before them, he united the Scripture that they had read all their lives, he united that Scripture with the subject of the Scripture that they had read all their lives. That is an amazing thought. They had been reading about the Messiah, hoping for his arrival, and in verse 16 he came to Nazareth. They had been reading about him, and now here he comes. "And as was his custom he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day and he stood up to read."

On that Sabbath day in Nazareth, the Messiah of Scripture actually read the Scripture to these people, and the very passage that identified him as the Messiah and explained his ministry to them. But, not only that, when he read, he read words of salvation to them, not of judgment. Look at verse 17, "The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled

the scroll and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

Look, Jesus had grown up with these people He knew their hypocrisies. He knew their petty jealousies, their village squabbles, their petty rivalries. He knew the expressions of their sinful desires expressed in their behavior, in their words, indicated by how they treated each other. Like all of us, these people did not deserve words of tenderness, did they? They deserved divine judgment. But God sent Jesus to read these words of grace, to announce the favorable year of the Lord, not his judgment.

Listen, if he's looking carefully at your life, he's looking carefully at my life, what does Jesus see? What thoughts flow through our minds? What kinds of petty complaints do we harbor, bitternesses do we hold on to? What kind of temptations solicit themselves to us? What kind of hypocrisies are apparent to him? What kind of critical-spirited judgments do we have about others? Look, all of us, like the people in Nazareth,

deserve judgment. But he begins here, he begins with words of grace, words of favor. God is here preparing these people to see Jesus, not first as judge, but as Savior. And he sent them an early report of all that Jesus had done. He sent Jesus into their midst to read the Bible to them, read these words of grace, so gracious, so kind.

Here's another way that God prepared these people. Jesus didn't just read Scripture. He didn't just read words of grace. You know what else he did? He explained the Scripture to them. He was the expositing preacher that day. He didn't just read and leave the interpretation to them; he explained it as well. Verse 20 says, "He rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down." Which means he assumed the position for teaching. "And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him." It says in verse 21, "And he began to say to them, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'"

That got their attention. They're hooked up and they're going on the track with him. It's an explosive statement. The next verse says, verse 22 says, "They marveled." That describes a common reaction to Jesus' teaching. Over and over people would proclaim, no one has ever said anything like this guy. No one has ever taught like he's teaching right now. No one has ever

expressed this kind of power, this kind of authority in his teaching. And what he taught them here from Isaiah 61, that text announced himself as the Messiah, it explained the purposes of his anointing, why the Holy Spirit was upon him in power, it unpacked the purpose of his mission. He taught these people exactly, precisely, what all these words meant.

Listen, there's no one on earth that received the kind of gracious preparation that these people received. The people of Nazareth were the beneficiaries, right here, of amazing grace. They watched Jesus grow up. None of them could remember any sin that he'd ever committed. They knew he was remarkable, but to hear him teach, to hear him say, verse 21, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," frankly, no one, like these people here, better prepared to see Jesus for who he really is.

Folks, listen, that's what makes verse 22 to be one of the most colossal failures in all of the New Testament. All spoke well of him, marveled at the gracious words coming out of his mouth, they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?" It should really stand out to us; it should leap off the page. "They spoke well," as they should, "of him." "They marveled," which is appropriate. But to only draw this dull, dim-witted, conclusion, "Is this not



Joseph's son?" Folks, that an absolute failure. And it's not just a mistake, it's a very grave sin.

Even if they meant it favorably, which might not be the case, by the way, they may be saying, who does he think he is coming back here and putting himself at the center of that text? I mean, really, the audacity of that guy! But even if they are expressing surprise that this son of Joseph, a lowly carpenter, that he's such an amazing teacher, you know what, they've sorely misidentified him by esteeming him too lowly. That's a sin, folks.

Again, verse 18, notice the, the center of all of this text is Jesus himself. He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...He has anointed me...He has sent me." And "Today, this Scripture," me, "has been fulfilled in your hearing." Joseph's son? Really? Not the anointed one? Not *ha'mâshîyach*, the Messiah of Israel? That's kind of hard to fathom, maybe, from our vantage point as we read the text, as we have the benefit of 2,000 years of hindsight. But we need to ask, What is it that explains such a dull, spiritually insensitive response? The answer is captured by a single word; it's the word unbelief.

These people are unregenerate, they're blind, they're unable to see the Messiah standing right in front of them even

though God has graciously prepared them to recognize him when he visited the synagogue. They can't see him. He's even read the very text about him, and he said, Hey, that's me and here I am. And they can't see him. They're blinded by unbelief.

This obstinacy of unbelief, it's understood only when you consider the power of spiritual deadness. They don't see and hear because they can't see and hear. And, going further, the mystery of iniquity is this: that they can't see and hear because they won't see and hear. Look, that's the mark of spiritual deadness. It's not simply inability; it's an unwillingness to come to the truth, to come to the light. Their hearts are revealed here. Jesus, though, he continues. These are words of confrontation that come next.

Starting in Luke 4 verse 23, we hear from Jesus, this is going to be point two in your outline, we hear from Jesus that he gives us the gloomy prediction, the gloomy prediction. In the next several verses, verses 23 to 27, we're going to see two proverbs, two prophets. He starts with the two proverbs, and he's just laying down a principle that lies at the heart of their rejection.

So, take a look at verses 23 to 24. These are the two proverbs. "He said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this

proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.' And he said," verse 24, "'Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.'" So, he quotes a proverb that's really, characterizes them as kind of coming from their mind, and then he answers or retorts with one of his own. And he begins both proverbs with statement of strong affirmation, "Doubtless you will quote this to me." And then verse 24 "truly," that's the word *amēn*, right, amen. "Truly, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown."

It's a future tense there in verse 23 "Doubtless you will quote this proverb to me." He's not just predicting the future like, Hey, one day you're going to say this." This future tense is used here to show a strong affirmation of what they're really believing right then and there. This is a revelation. He's exposed their thinking here. He's basically reading their minds, their thoughts and you can almost hear the sadness in his voice here. I mean, like I said, he knew these people well, for better and for worse. But he loves these people. These are his family, his friends, cares for them, and here he is publicly revealing their sinful expectations.

The first proverb, it's a common saying in Jesus' day, "Physician, heal yourself." It could mean, take care of your own

affairs first; it could mean that. Jesus interpreted this saying in the very next sentence, he says that, Physician, heal yourself, it means, give your people the benefit of your miracle working power. Physician, heal yourself, means, hey, take care of your own crowd. Take care of us.

Notice the thoughts that he exposed there. "What we've heard you did at Capernaum." Is that a taunt? We've heard about your miracles, we've heard about mighty works but prove it. Show us what you can really do, if we're going to believe in you. Look, if that's what they're thinking, and it kind of appears that it was. Those are very wicked thoughts.

The people want healing. They want miracles. They want tangible and, beneficial for them, expression of practical power. They want his miracles. They want all that he has done for other people, they want him to do it right there. And all he's done is come back and read the Bible to them. I mean, come on. All he's done is come back and give them another sermon. I heard one last week, Jesus, and I'm going to hear one next week. Come on, start dancing. I want to see miracles. They were impressed with his teaching, yeah, but they virtually ignored it. His words were crowded out in their hearts by their own sinful expectation. They don't want to hear mere words any more.

They wanted to see miracles. They expect to get something from him. They expect him to send a little love their way.

That proverb, by the way, "Physician, heal yourself," if you're familiar with the Gospel narratives you can hear kinda the echoes of that at the cross, right? Jesus is dying for the sins of his people and the cruel taunts that come rolling out, this time unrestrained, not whispered, but now vocalized and aimed at him without relent, without mercy. Those who passed by derided him. They're wagging their heads, and they're saying, "You who would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself. If you're the Son of God, come down from the cross."

The same proverb, it's applied, a little bit, in a different way, "Physician, heal yourself." The chief priests they come by with the scribes and the elders, and they mocked him too. And they said, He saved others. He can't save himself. This physician is a fraud; saved others, he can't save himself. He's the king of Israel, let him come down now from the cross and we will believe in him." Not likely. You want us to believe in you, save yourself and then we'll consider your claims.

Who's on the lordship of their reason? They are, right? Their own sinful judgment is sitting as lord and arbiter in

their hearts of what's they're going to accept and what they're going to reject. Perform to our expectations; we'll think about taking you seriously. These folks had no understanding of Scripture, which had taught them plainly that the Messiah had to die, had to be on that cross. But they didn't understand that. They were blinded by their own expectations.

Well, this cruel, unbelieving, spirit of taunting and reviling, even blaspheming, Luke wants us to see this right here at the very outset of his Gospel, that this is present in the people of Israel from the very beginning. And that when we get to the end of his Gospel and Jesus is on the cross, and you know what? Frankly, we're not surprised. We understand. It's a hard heart of unbelief; which, by the way, is the hardest substance in the world, harder than any diamond and it's deadly, too, as we're going to see.

To answer to the proverb that would one day be in the mouth of these people, and was in their hearts even now, Jesus retorted with a proverb of his own. He said, "Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown." We have a similar saying, don't we? Familiarity breeds contempt.

Why did he say that? What's the point he's trying to make? He's pointing out that their rejection of him, it has nothing to

do with miracles or no miracles. It doesn't have anything to do with him giving them a little miracle love or holding it back. It's not that they don't have evidence of his healing power, of his divine authority because they'd heard the reports. They knew what he said from Isaiah the prophet. They'd heard his teaching; his power, his strength, his authority, was unmistakable, undeniable.

The issue is a matter of unbelieving contempt. Rejecting what is familiar. The people, as I said, were not going to believe in him until he'd met their expectations, until he had given them something that they deemed worthy of believing. But, until then, they're not listening. Hometown crowd, it's always happy to receive a hero but not a prophet. They're thrilled about a popular figure because popularity puts them on the map. He starts doing miracles there, all of the suddenly, boom! Nazareth is on the map with a capital N. When the tide of popularity, prosperity rises, all boats rise with it, right?

So, they are very happy to welcome home the one who will make them healthy and wealthy, prosperous, famous. But they're reticent to embrace the one who will call them to be holy. I hope that's not true of any one of us. I hope we're all coming

here week after week, not because we want to be happy first, but because we want to be holy.

That's what God offers us in the gospel, is it not? To remove every sin in the cross by a dreadful curse on his own son and take away every single sin of thought, word, and deed, sin of past, present, and future, sins of omission and commission, everything, everything from the smallest to the greatest and everything in between, take it all way. He wants us to be holy, that's what the sacrifice is about.

On the other side, not only is our sin imputed to Christ on the cross, but his perfect righteousness, that's imputed to us so that his righteousness becomes our righteousness. It's a perfect righteousness. It's absolute holiness. Beloved, that's the gospel. Sin gone, righteousness in its place, standing before God in his holiness, in Christ's holiness; not rejected but embraced. As Hebrews tells us, we're to strive for holiness because without holiness no one will see the Lord.

So, if holiness is our concern, we will receive Jesus and everything he has to say, and we will come into church every single week with that expectation. That this event we do here every single week is not about making me happy, it's about



making me holy. You know what? In holiness, happiness comes for the believer.

Well, let's look at what happens next, because, folks, this is what really sets people off. You have to see that Jesus has responded to these folks with such generous mercy here, such graciousness. He could write them off and walk away, but he instead, he took the time to teach them out of their own history with a view to leading them to repentance and faith. It is provocative, no doubt. It is pressing the issue home. He's making them uncomfortable. He's making them squirm. And, as we see, he makes them angry. But he's not doing it to make them angry. He wants them to be saved.