

Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

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Date: 31 March 2019

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[0 : 0 0] The Bible reading is Luke chapter 4 verses 14 to 30 and it's on page 1031 in the church Bibles.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth where he had been brought up and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue as was his custom. He stood up to read and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it he found the place where it is written, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

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. He began by saying to them, today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. 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. 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 you have heard that you did in Capernaum? Truly I tell you, he continued, no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

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. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy at the time of Elisha, the prophet. Yet not one of them was cleansed, only Naaman, the Syrian.

[2 : 2 1] All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. This is the word of the Lord.

Great. Well, thank you so much, Ruth, for reading and Martin for leading. They got it just about right.

Let me pray as we start. Father, I pray that we would wonder in the glories of your grace this morning. Please, may our hearts be slanted heavenward and may those things that are encouraging be remembered and those that are not be forgotten. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Great. Well, each family has those family quirks. We know the various characters in the family, your dad, your mom, and they've got their little nuances about them. And I'll tell you the family quirk in my family, and that was my father. He was an absolute sucker for a lost leader. A lost leader, that's a deal. That's going to come around and be the next big thing. So whether it was the fish kettles that he bought or the thousand squid heads that he bought or my personal favorite was a crate of pineapple jam that was obviously going to be delicious and eaten every breakfast and was going to be the very next big thing. And he bought so many of these things that we had this little cupboard where we were used to put these lost leaders and these great deals that he had found to be left in there and forgotten and never talked about again. But the thing there is that he was after an offer that was too good to be true. An offer that was outrageous in his generosity. And it's this morning that we're considering that kind of outrageous, generous offer. So by way and context, we're back in Luke's gospel. And Luke is really the upside down gospel. So time and again within Luke's gospel, we see those who are outside of God's kingdom being brought in and those who are inside of God's kingdom going out. And the reason for this is the overwhelming, super abundant nature of God's grace that we're going to look at and think about this morning. So we remember so far, we're in the beginning of Luke and Luke is asking the question, who is Jesus? And so far he's portrayed Jesus as being someone who is spirit empowered, word saturated, who's loved God's word, whose coming has been announced as bringing both judgment and salvation and whose coming will be marked by conflict.

And in our reading this morning, we see this at the start, we see the start of Jesus's public ministry in verses 14 and 15, which center around him going into Galilee. And initially Jesus's ministry starts off very well. So look down with me at verse 14, Jesus returned to Galilee and the power of the spirit and the news about him spread through the whole countryside. And he was teaching in their synagogues and everyone praised him. And they praised him because of what Jesus was teaching, that he was teaching in their synagogues. And in particular, what he was teaching was about himself. And he was speaking of his mission. So our first point there, the Savior's mission, verse 14 to 21. And in the Isaiah 61 quotes that we see there quoted in verses 18 to 19, we have a summary of Jesus's teaching and mission as God's appointed Savior throughout his time. And the first thing that we notice is what Jesus claims about himself is that he is the anointed servant of the Lord. So look down at the start of verse 18.

[6 : 58] The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me. That is, he has been anointed as God's chosen king forever, the Messiah. The second thing that we, that Jesus teaches about himself and his mission is that it is a mission of proclamation to preach good news to the poor. And the poor in Luke's gospel, they might include those who are financially hard up. So we think of our students and our refugees in Glasgow.

But more often, he's talking about those who are spiritually poor, those who are outside of God's kingdom, who are not members of God's family, and who are cut off from fellowship with God's people.

You see, Luke argues that no matter what our physical circumstances is, we are all spiritually poor and in need of salvation. And the reason for this is given in Jesus's third point and claim about his mission, that he has come to proclaim freedom to the prisoners there. And the word prisoners there, that is not the word that we use for someone who's nicked a packet of crisps and has gone off to the chookie. But he's talking about someone who is a prisoner of war, a prisoner of conflict. And what he means is that Jesus has come to proclaim the forgiveness for sins. And that is outside of this forgiveness, we are held captive by the devil in sin. We are slaves and enslaved to sin. We are prisoners of a spiritual conflict. And we are spiritually poor. The fourth claim that Jesus makes is that he has come to restore the sight of the blind. And in Luke's gospel, yes, we do see Jesus restoring people's sight. But Isaiah's great complaint, from which Jesus is reading and teaching in this passage, is that God's people have become spiritually blind as to who God is. And therefore, we're unable to proclaim God's glory to the rest of the world. And the final claim that Jesus makes is that he has come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. That is, Jesus was as God's anointed king forever to proclaim the final reckoning and balancing of the books, where righteousness would be rewarded and wickedness would be punished. But the year of the Lord's favor was to be a time marked by forgiveness, restoration, overwhelming joy, the establishment of God's perfect heavenly city, where all people dwelt in peace at the end of the age, at the end of all things, a place of no tears, no hardship, no wickedness. And it was going to be glorious. No Glasgow coats, sun every day, a place where your team always won, where there'd be no police, because there was no crime. No one ever spoke of Brexit there. And best of all, Tiffin, every day, it is going to be absolutely glorious.

And so you can imagine the excitement that the Israelites felt on that day, on that Saturday morning in Nazareth, here is the renowned teacher, the speaker, Jesus. And he's speaking from one of the most profound sections in the prophets. What's he going to say? And while the action slows down in verse 20, and so what do we read? He rolled up the scroll. Yes, he handed it back to the attendant.

Come on, Luke. And sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on Jesus.

[11 : 09] And he began to say to them, today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. Well, Luke doesn't bother to tell us the rest of the sermon. But in saying this, Jesus is claiming that he is God's Messiah, God's chosen king forever, who would bring all this gloriousness about. And the point of what Jesus is saying is not that we are to try and copy Jesus in this, that is, that we try and build Jesus' kingdom down here, although it is good to do good things, but that we acknowledge our dependence and trust in Jesus. And the question that I need to ask myself from this passage is not what social good deeds I can do in the next week, although it is good to do good things, but have I accepted and trusted

Jesus as God's chosen anointed king forever? Now, having examined the Savior's mission, we now look at the offense that the Savior causes in the next section. So verses 22 to 30 there. And initially, the people respond very favorably to Jesus. So look down with me at verse 22. All spoke well of him.

They were amazed at his gracious words that came from his lips. And the thing that has amazed them there is Jesus' gracious words. That is, literally, his words of grace. That is, that you can be right with God, not through anything that you do, but simply trusting and believing that Jesus will forgive your sins.

But soon, their amazement, their initial amazement, turns into incredulity. Isn't this Joseph's son?

We know him. He's nothing special. He's one of us. What's he on about? But the disbelief is perhaps only hinted at in verse 22. Jesus lays absolutely bare, clear as day, in verse 23. He says, surely you'll quote this proverb to me, physician, heal yourself. And the issue here is that Jesus' claims about who he is and what he has come to do are simply too big for them. They want proof that Jesus is who he is. So Jesus says in verse 23, and you will tell me, do here in your hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum. And in saying this, Jesus is saying, if it's proof that you're after, why have you not already believed the reports of the miracles that I have already done?

[14 : 09] Why do you want me to do miracles only for you not to believe them and not to believe in me? And it's not that they have a lack of evidence, but that they won't believe the evidence that they already have regarding Jesus. So you can imagine them saying, Jesus, we hear you claim to be God's anointed king, and we've heard of the miracles, but we've got to see them for ourselves. We have to see them with our own eyes. Otherwise, we're never going to believe. Your claims are simply too big and too extraordinary. And it's the same for us today, isn't it really? So we hear Jesus' claims, we read the evidence of his life, but then we balk at believing in him. We reject his claims as simply too big. Or we might experience God's goodness to us. We might delight in his word in one moment, but in the next moment, and we pull back and believing that God really does the love and care for us in the way that he has said he does. I cannot believe that Jesus calmed a storm, they might say.

I can't believe that Jesus raised a man. It's a claim that's too big for them to believe. And we might say the similar thing. So we might say, well, I'm happy to accept Jesus as a good moral teacher, but I don't accept that he was the son of God. Or we edit out the bits of God's word that we don't want to believe, that we find too hard to believe. We think they're uncomfortable or unbelievable. So here's a religious commentator this week writing in a magazine. He's doing a book review. And this is what he says about Jesus. A first century Jew of undoubted spiritual and prophetic genius. But what has he left out there? What has he not said about Jesus? He has not called Jesus the Son of God or God's chosen King forever. So it's a claim that's too big. And the next thing that we notice that they react against, that they find offensive, is that Jesus's message of grace is too big. And Jesus states the issue in verse 24. So look down with me at verse 24. Truly I tell you, he continued, no prophet is accepted in his hometown. And it really is the problem of pride.

They will not accept Jesus for who he says he is out of pride. God's grace is too big. And this is the point of the two illustrations or stories that Jesus provides. So picking up in verse 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. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy at the time of Elisha the prophet. Yet none of them was cleansed, only Naaman the Syrian. And Jesus says this, and the people are furious. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they had heard this.

They wanted to execute Jesus. Jesus had just claimed to be God's anointed king. Jesus, who had done miracles in Capernaum. Jesus, who had grown up as a boy, devoted to the scriptures, who were spirit-empowered, who amazed them with his teaching. But when Jesus suggests that God's grace and favor is given freely to outsiders, they wanted to kill him. So verse 29, they got up, drove him out of the town, took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. See, God's grace was too generous for them.

So what was important to them? That you were from the right nation. That you did the right things. That you behaved in the right way. That you had the right family. That you spoke in the right manner.

[18 : 49] Everything that gave them something to be proud about. But what does Jesus say is important to God? Not where you come from, or what you wear, or what you've done, or who you know. But that you simply put aside your pride and give up trying to be God in God's place. And admit that you're hopeless and helpless without mercy and grace. See, what did the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian have in common? I wonder if you spotted it. They were both completely helpless and hopeless in their need of salvation.

The widow of Zarephath was about to die from starvation. Naaman the Syrian general, he had an incurable disease of leprosy. In both cases, they had to lay aside their pride and admit their need.

So, I remember the end of my second year at college, I'd hit a bit of a, I'd mistimed my run down into the 2-2 that I was aiming for. And I realized that I was maybe not going to quite land on that 2-2 that I was aiming for. And in a moment, but the issue in me admitting this was my pride. And I needed to really approach the red star cup in hand saying, look, this is the issue.

I had to lay aside my pride and admit that I'd got it wrong. I'd mistimed my landing and that I needed some help. And gratefully, the red star was incredibly kind in helping me and giving me a great big dose of mercy to get my designated 2-2 that I was quite keen to get on. Naaman is told what he needs to do to be cured of his leprosy by Elijah. And initially, if you remember the story from 2-2, when he hears this, he reacts with pompous fury. Elijah, go wash in the Jordan. Who is this guy?

I am Naaman, the greatest Syrian general in the world. But then Naaman's slave girl comes up to him and she says, my father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it?

[21 : 04] How much more than when he tells you, wash and be cleansed? See, what was the slave girl instructing Naaman to do in all his stubborn pride? Simply accept that he was a hopeless leper who is in need of cleansing. It's a scandalous grace. But the Nazarenes, having been told by Jesus that he is God's king, when he says that God gives his mercy to the humble, even when they are the enemies of the Israelites, this is so outrageous to them that they try to destroy and kill Jesus. But it's the exact kind of outrageous grace that points to the Savior that they need and that we need today. It's the kind of overwhelming grace that speaks volumes of Jesus' love for us, that he would willingly lay down his life and die the death that we deserved, that we might know God and his scandalous, glorious grace towards the unlovely and unlovable. So what about you? How might you respond to this outrageous, generous grace that has been shown you in Jesus? And here's a couple of thoughts just to focus our applications. The first thing is, don't miss the upside-down nature of the gospel, of Luke's gospel. God's grace is for everyone.

Don't miss the scandalous nature of this grace. It's not limited only to the rich, respectable, and religious. And if you are rich, respectable, and religious, don't take that as a sign that you're in God's grace. Pray for mercy. Seek Jesus' face day by day. The next thing that I might encourage us in is that, are you in the danger of playing down Jesus' claims? It might be that you are sitting here this morning and that you're happy to accept that Jesus may have been a prophet or a very spiritual man, but you draw the line at him being God. The gospels, they don't leave you an option. You see, to deny Jesus' divinity is to deny Jesus. The third thing that I thought we might notice is that it might be that you're in the danger of making God's grace small, of shrinking God's grace. What do I mean by that?

You might come to church on Sunday, and you might sit down next to someone, and you might look down on them because you know where they've been, and you know what they've done, and you know their lifestyle, and you draw back at that. You think, well, God's grace isn't big enough to cover that and redeem them and heal them from that. But it's the exact same grace that has saved them that saves you. Or conversely, it might be that you're coming here today as someone who's feeling incredibly poor, that you feel your spiritual poverty acutely. You have a difficult time accepting God's outrageous and generous grace, his restoring and cleansing grace. You might think, well, God can't forgive me.

He doesn't know what I've done. But God chose you when you were still in the womb. Before you had done anything good or bad, or anything had happened in your life, God had chosen you. Jesus came for you.

Jesus died for you. Warts and all, come to him in your brokenness and emptiness and poverty. And having come to him, know then that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, nor the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height or depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Let me pray for us as we close. So Father, we thank you so much for this outrageous, generous grace that you've shown us in your Son. Help us to delight in it every day. Help us to respond accordingly to it. And help us to never take it for granted. In Jesus' name, Amen.