



Luke 4:22–27

2 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 home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”’ 24 ‘Truly I tell you,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his home town. 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.'

Reflection

They say a picture is worth a thousand words and for Luke the scene he sets before our eyes is a priceless portrait of Jesus. Luke has carefully investigated everything from the beginning, no doubt sifting

through eyewitness testimony after eyewitness testimony, sorting through story after story, travelling far and wide to get the facts about Jesus straight so that he can sit down, put them in the proper order, bring all his scholarly gifts to bear, and write his orderly account of the birth of Christianity, his two-volume work, Luke-Acts. And yet for Luke, medical doctor, scholar and historian, one story from the first year of Jesus' ministry takes pride of place. Luke would have us enter the ministry of Jesus through this one story – an episode in the life of Jesus that announces who Jesus is, what he has come to do, and how he will be received. And this story takes place in a very trusted and familiar setting for the ancient hearer. Jesus has been asked to preach in his hometown synagogue in Nazareth.

In first century Palestine the synagogue sat at the centre of Jewish religious and cultural life. Synagogue services were rather informal. They consisted of the singing of Psalms, prayers, reading of Scripture, a sermon, and the giving of alms for the poor. Since Israel was exiled from their lands some six hundred years ago and scattered right throughout the Ancient Near East the local synagogue – some as small as the gathering of ten Jewish men – had arisen as a surrogate, a replacement for the temple in Jerusalem, but of course without altars, sacrifices and priests. The local synagogue was led by non-ordained lay people, amongst whom the Pharisees were the most prominent. The synagogue became the institutional centre of a religion of the Book, not of the altar, which in time

became and remains today the dominant form of Judaism. While there was only one temple in Jerusalem, synagogues rose everywhere. And the synagogue was not only an assembly for worship but also a school, a community centre, and a place for administering justice, forming the very centre of Jewish religious and cultural life. And so in Luke's opening account of the adult ministry of Jesus we find him in a very familiar setting to the ancient hearer. Among relatives and friends, in the synagogue Jesus is at home.

Jesus' reputation has preceded him. News about him has spread throughout the Galilean countryside. He's been teaching in the synagogues, healing the sick, performing great miracles, and everyone is praising him. And so on arriving in his home-

town of Nazareth he is asked to preach at synagogue. He reads from the prophet Isaiah about the Messiah, God's suffering servant anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit to preach the good news of a season of God's favour, a season of grace, mercy and forgiveness before the universal judgment of God comes upon all humankind. And as Jesus sets down the scroll, Luke recounts in yesterday's passage that,

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.'

With everyone's undivided attention, the air hanging heavy with expectation Jesus begins his sermon

with ‘Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.’ Isaiah wrote these words about me.

Luke continues his vivid account in today’s passage, Luke 4:22–27,

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 home town what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”’ 24 ‘Truly I tell you,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his home town. 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.'

I love the first half of verse 22. After Jesus had finished preaching,

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips.

I can only imagine Jesus gracious words

and the authority with which he taught the Scriptures. But then it appears that the murmuring starts.

‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?’ Isn’t this the carpenter’s boy? How can he claim to be the Messiah? If *he’s* a prophet, then *I’m* Isaiah! How about a few tricks then? Like those so-called ‘miracles’ in Capernaum. It wouldn’t be too much to ask of a real prophet. Preach to the poor, heal the blind, release prisoners and free the oppressed? Who does he think he is?

Jesus addresses their muttering directly,

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 home town

what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”²⁴ ‘Truly I tell you,’ he continued, ‘no prophet is accepted in his home town.

And then Jesus pours fuel onto the fire through two Old Testaments examples: Elijah and the widow; and Elisha and Namaan. We’ll explore both of these examples in tomorrow’s talk but the thrust of them is this, Elijah and Elisha were both prophets of God and both the widow and Namaan were Gentiles, that is, non-Jews. First Jesus is telling them that the Messiah has come not for them but for the poor, blind, oppressed, and prisoners and now he’s contrasting these good, respectable, synagogue-attending family oriented, solid citizens of Nazareth with a Gentile widow and former leper – with the strong sug-

gestion that both Namaan and widow are wiser and more spiritual than they!

As you can well expect, and as we'll see in tomorrow's passage, things head south rather quickly. And we'll unpack this rapid change of heart and violent response to Jesus tomorrow.

Think & Pray

But with what time remains today spend some time thinking over the dangers of familiarity and pride. The citizens of Nazareth initially responded well to Jesus' words; taking them on merit they were amazed that the gracious words that Jesus spoke. But then their familiarity with Jesus, and their own personal pride, began to cloud their judgment and their mo-

ment of salvation was lost. He's one of us, how dare he rise so high? For all his talk that's still just Jesus, Joseph's boy. What could a carpenter know of the things of God? Familiarity breeds contempt. Consider the dangers of familiarity in your life today. From one angle, it's easy to lose the passion of our first love for Jesus in the weekly routines of the Christian life. How can we guard against the truth of the Gospel and our relationship with Jesus becoming run-of-the-mill through familiarity? And then there's Jesus' insightful comment,

‘no prophet is accepted in his home town.’

That's why sharing the Gospel with your family is so hard. They know you too well.

They know your history; every single fault, every single time you've compromised your faith in your actions towards them. Even the son of God, who never sinned, struggled to preach in his hometown.

Pray today against the dangers of familiarity in your own life. Pray that God's word would always be living and active, exciting you and driving you forward by the power of the Holy Spirit to be an increasingly passionate and active Christian. And pray also today for your hometown, for your neighbours, your friends, your family. Pray that by the power of the Holy Spirit they would accept the new you, that they would acknowledge the change that has come over you, and that they would see past you in order to see Jesus in you. Pray today that you would be a prophet to them,

speaking the very words of God, and that they might receive your message and accept him into their hearts.