

Jesus Comes Home to Rejection

Luke 4:20-32

²⁰ 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. ²¹ He began to tell them, "Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." ²² They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth. And they kept saying, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" ²³ He told them, "Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself!' Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum." ²⁴ And he said, "Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ But truly I tell you: There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land. ²⁶ Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. ²⁹ They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. ³⁰ But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way. ³¹ He went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath. ³² They were amazed by his teaching, because his message had authority.

"Mom, Dad, I'm coming home." Those are usually pleasant words that parents like to hear. Maybe their son or daughter has recently emptied the nest and gone off to school or entered the military. Parents usually enjoy hearing when their son or daughter is making a homecoming. They may even make a big deal about it. They may get family and friends together. Maybe they'll throw a big party because their child is coming home.

In the text before us, Jesus was making a homecoming. He was returning to his earthly hometown of Nazareth. There Jesus grew up. He made friends there. He helped his dad with his carpentry business. And when he was 30, it was time to leave the comforts of his hometown. It was time to do the work his heavenly Father sent him to do. He started his ministry with his baptism by his cousin John the Baptist. There his eternal Father voiced his approval and the Holy Spirit filled him with the necessary gifts for a successful ministry. His ministry included preaching and teaching. He even healed people of diseases and drove out evil spirits. With his miracles he drew people to his saving gospel message. News about this wonderful Son from Nazareth had spread all over Palestine. And now Jesus was coming home—back to the town where he grew up. You'd think they'd throw a parade for him. At least rent out their community center if they had one. Many did gather in their synagogue to hear him preach. They weren't missing that Sabbath. But when everything was said and done, they did not welcome him. The Gospel writer John tells us that Jesus came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him (1:11). Instead of taking to heart his saving message, the people of Nazareth really wanted no part of him. Instead of a pleasant homecoming, Jesus came home to rejection. That should surprise us, especially when you consider how Jesus came to them with a message that really hit home. He preached his message with such authority. But Jesus will explain for us why he came home to face rejection: *No prophet is accepted in his hometown*. As we consider this Scripture, we'll see why Jesus came home to rejection.

At first the people received him well. Luke tells us, "*They all spoke well of him and were impressed by the words of grace that came from his mouth.*" The people were impressed with Jesus. On that Sabbath, the attendant handed Jesus the scroll of Isaiah. Jesus rolled it until it came to the part of Isaiah, which in our Bibles is chapter 61. And there he read, "*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*" (Luke 4:18,19). Luke tells us Jesus then rolled up the scroll, handed it to the attendant and then sat

down. In those days, the rabbi or teacher would sit to deliver his explanation of the text. With the eyes of everyone focused on Jesus, he delivered this explanation: *“Today, this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* Our Lord explained that he was the one the prophet was speaking of. At his baptism God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit to preach good news to the poor. Jesus would bind up the brokenhearted and proclaim freedom for those held captive by sin, death, and Satan. Jesus would find those who were lost in the darkness of unbelief and bring them into the light of faith. Jesus was the one Isaiah pointed to who would proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. Jesus had come to comfort all who mourn. He was the great preacher that Isaiah prophesied. Jesus was the Messiah that all of Old Testament Scripture had promised.

When the people heard Jesus say, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,” they were at first impressed with their hometown boy. But then they began to consider what Jesus was really saying. *“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”* How could a person who grew up with them in their own town be the Messiah that God sent to rescue his people? God’s Son? It couldn’t be. This was Joseph’s boy. And soon their awe for him turned ugly. Jesus told them, *“Certainly you will quote this proverb to me, ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ Do here in your hometown everything we heard you did in Capernaum.”* And he said, *“Amen I tell you: No prophet is accepted in his hometown.”* By quoting this proverb, Jesus showed them that he knew exactly what they wanted. They wanted Jesus to prove he had the right to make such a high claim for himself. The promised Messiah? Sure Jesus. How about doing some of those miracles we heard you did in Capernaum. Heal yourself, Doc. Then maybe we’ll let you examine us? Jesus wanted his own people to see how desperately their spiritual condition was. That way they could turn to Jesus, the great Physician of souls. But instead of welcoming Jesus into their hearts, they hid behind the walls of unbelief. They let their familiarity with Jesus get in the way. They remained in their sin sick state. They refused the only cure for the deadly disease that infected them all—the disease called sin.

Jesus’ diagnosis wasn’t quite done. The people of Nazareth shared a sin that seemed to infect most people in Jesus’ day. That sin was sinful pride that felt somehow God owed them more favor than any other nation. So Jesus brought two examples from Israel’s history to show how wrong they were. The Great Teacher reminded them: *“There were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut for three years and six months, while a great famine came over all the land. Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow of Zarephath, in Sidon. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was healed except Naaman the Syrian.”* Jesus used these two examples to show you can’t put a limit on God’s grace. God told Moses, *“I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion”* (Romans 9:15). God didn’t owe the people of Israel any favors. Israel once had to suffer through a 3 ½ year drought. But God didn’t send his prophet Elijah to help anyone in Israel. He sent Elijah to a pagan widow who lived outside of Israel. And God could have used Elijah’s successor, Elisha, to cure any Israelite person who had the terrible skin disease called leprosy. But God brought healing to a foreign man named Naaman.

Jesus used these Old Testament examples to cut through the hearts of his listeners and uncover their sin. But instead of repenting, the people of Nazareth were seized with uncontrollable rage. Luke tells us, *“All those who were in the synagogue were filled with rage when they heard these things. They got up and drove him out of the town. They led him to the*

brow of the hill on which their town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff.” Jesus’ words did cut deep down and struck a nerve. He ignited a fuse that turned into an angry mob. How dare this son of a carpenter insult them by telling them that they deserved no more of God’s grace than any despised heathen did! Their amazement soon turned to resentment. Their initial kind words turned into murderous thoughts. They weren’t going to listen to him any longer. And they were going to make sure no one else could listen to him either. They decided to throw him off a cliff. But just when our Lord was about to plunge to his death, Luke tells us, *“But he passed through the middle of them and went on his way.”* As determined as his fellow townsfolk were to be done with him, Jesus showed more determination to complete his saving work. His time to die was not for these people or any people to decide. That was up to Jesus and his heavenly Father. Jesus didn’t run away scared. He left them resolute. He had a job to do. He had sermons to preach. He had lessons to teach. And if the people of Nazareth were not going to listen, then he’d take his preaching and teaching elsewhere. Luke tells us, *“He went down to Capernaum, a town of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbath. They were amazed by his teaching, because his message had authority.”* Jesus didn’t let what happened in his hometown slow him down. He had a saving message that everyone needed to hear. He had souls to save.

Can we understand how difficult it must have been for people who grew up with Jesus to believe in him? Before Cousin John baptized him in the Jordan, Jesus pretty much did what other people did. He earned a living, providing for his mother and younger siblings when father Joseph died. But then came his baptism when he was filled with the Holy Spirit. He began healing people. He began preaching and teaching with authority. Jesus once said, *“I do nothing on my own, but speak just what the Father has taught me”* (John 8:28). Could we ever get to a point in our life that we feel we don’t need Jesus anymore? How much do we treasure listening to God’s Word? Why is it a struggle for us to take time each day and listen to our Savior? It’s because we are sinful by nature. Sinful flesh tries to convince us that listening to Jesus is a waste of time. The time you set aside for worship and Bible study—well, you could be enjoying a lot of other things in life. The sad reality is that we sometimes listen to our sinful self. Joy doesn’t always fill us when our Savior invites us to come to him for rest. We don’t always use every opportunity to sit at Jesus’ feet the way Mary did. Sometimes we busy ourselves the way Martha did and miss out on the one thing needful.

What if our Savior was to treat us the way we sometimes treat him? What if he were to take his word away from us? You know where that would leave us for eternity. We need Jesus and we need his word. We need him to remind us of the sorry condition that sin has left us in. We need the Great Physician of our soul to bring us the only cure for sin. That cure came when God’s own Son took on human flesh. He suffered through some of the fiercest temptations Satan has ever thrown at anyone. He’d put up with rejection from people he dearly loved. He’d face the ultimate rejection when he carried our sins to a cross and paid the bitter price for them all. It cost him his innocent life. But it was all worth it when his heavenly Father accepted his payment for all sin. And raised him to life to prove it.

The people of Nazareth were so blinded by unbelief they couldn’t see their sin. And so they rejected the only cure for sin—the greatest preacher and teacher then world has ever known. They had no room for him. May we always find room for him in our pulpit, our Sunday school and Bible study classrooms, our hearts and our lives. Don’t reject him. Listen and believe what he says. He’s the only One who brings you eternal life.