

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Jesus' Return to Nazareth: Rejection by the People

Scripture: Luke 4:22-30

Code: 42-55

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Rejection by the People

I met this week with a very famous rabbi, a very gracious man, very intelligent, a historian, very serious-minded man who asked to meet with me because we shared something in common, and that is a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible. And we both take God very seriously and take His Word seriously. And it's true of this rabbi, a very gracious man, very knowledgeable man. He cares about righteousness. He cares about the honor and the glory of God and he's given his life to serve God. I greatly enjoyed our time together and I believe we'll have more time in the future, and I look forward to that.

I was telling someone about my meeting with the rabbi and their comment was, "Why does he not believe in Jesus as Messiah and Savior?" And the answer to that question obviously is a very important answer, the answer is that people who don't believe when they know the facts don't believe for one reason, it's always the same reason, it's never different, it's always the same. When people know about Jesus Christ and they know the facts of Jesus Christ and they don't believe, there's only one reason why they don't believe. Everybody who rejects Jesus Christ as Messiah and Savior rejects Him for the very same reason and what that reason is will become clear to you this morning by the words of Jesus in the text of our message. Open your Bible to the fourth chapter of Luke.

This is one of those gripping and powerful portions of the Bible. Jesus is the speaker and the teacher in this passage, as you know from our study last week. His words captured the moment in a way that was shocking and they still grip us with their power and their force. Let's go back to verse 16 in Luke 4 and pick up the scene where it really begins.

"Jesus came to Nazareth where He had been brought up, and as His custom He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath and stood up to read, and the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him and He opened the book and found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor, He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.' And He closed the book and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed upon Him and He began to say to them, 'Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'

Imagine coming to church today expecting to hear me preaching and having the Lord Jesus Christ appear in person to tell you that He had come to fulfill all the prophecies of His Second Coming, all the prophecies of the glory of His Kingdom of salvation on earth. Imagine that you had come this morning and Jesus was standing in the pulpit to tell you that the time was now for the fulfillment of all prophecies and it would begin with Him taking us to heaven in the glories of the Rapture to the homes that He has prepared for us there.

Well that's something like the Jews in the Nazareth synagogue experienced that day. They had been all their lives to the synagogue, all their lives to that synagogue and they had heard reading after reading of the Torah, the law, and the Haftarah, the prophets, and sermon after sermon on Sabbath after Sabbath through millennia, if not centuries of years and they had heard many sermons about the Messiah and they had read many Scriptures about His coming. But all of a sudden on this Sabbath in the year 28, He was there. All those many years they had gathered to hear the law and the prophets and the law and the prophets had all spoken of the Messiah. They had come to the synagogue which, as Philo called it, was a house of instruction where the Scripture was read and explained. Many, many times the text was messianic and many times the text was read and explained and their hearts were filled with the hope of the Messiah's arrival. But on that day the Messiah Himself is the reader and He is the expositor, Messiah the Son of God Himself is the *mafteer*(?), to whom the *chazan* hands the haftarah.

It's true the reputation of Jesus had been growing, that's why they were so excited that He was going to speak in their synagogue. Verses 14 and 15 tell him...tell us about Him, "The news had spread throughout all the surrounding district," and verse 15 says, "He was being praised by all," His reputation was gathering by the time He came to this synagogue in Nazareth where He launches His year and a half Galilean ministry. He has already been ministering almost a year in the south, in Judea, with a few visits to Galilee. So the word is beginning to grow about Him. Here He comes to His own boyhood synagogue, and if, as historians tell us, the town of Nazareth had about 20,000 people, it would have had a lot of synagogues. They were like local churches in towns today, there are many in a given town. There were many synagogues and this was His boyhood synagogue with all the familiar faces there. He would have gone into that synagogue and seen His aunts and His uncles, and His half-brothers and half-sisters, and His cousins and distant relatives and friends and neighbors. They were all the familiar faces of His life there.

But this was a different day cause now He took the place of the Messiah and declared to them that He was the fulfillment of all messianic prophecy. He was the long-awaited anointed one, He was the Savior of the world. And so far the story has been positive. All the way through these four chapters

of Luke's gospel, everything has been very positive. And, of course, as I read in verse 15, He was at this point being praised by all and even in verse 22 all were speaking well of Him. The initial response to His speaking in the synagogue was positive. Everything was going so well. We've had four chapters. We've had months and months and months well over a year in Luke already and everything has been so positive. The tapestry of testimony from angels, from Gabriel, from the angels that gave testimony to the shepherds in the field, a rich testimony from godly men and women like Zacharias and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary and Simeon and Anna and even the testimony of the prophet himself John the Baptist, and it's all been positive up to now. There's just one little negative statement in all these chapters up to here, and that's in chapter 2 verse 34 and those searching words by Simeon, that old man in the temple, who said to Mary, "This child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel and for a sign to be opposed and a sword will pierce even your own soul." That was the only...that was the only negative in all these chapters that He was going to be opposed? Messiah? That He was going to cause people to fall as well as to rise? That He was going to be the reason for a sword to penetrate the heart of sweet Mary, His mother. Just that hint. But that begins to come true in the text before us. Let's follow the story. Pick it up where we left off.

Verse 22, "And all were speaking well of Him and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips and they were saying, 'Is this not Joseph's son?' And He said to them, 'No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, "Physician, heal thyself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in Your hometown as well.'" And He said, 'Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town, but I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah when the sky was shut up for three years and six months when a great famine came over all the land, and yet Elijah was sent to none of them and only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow and there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman, the Syrian.' And all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way."

We're in shock, aren't we? We haven't seen anything like this in all these chapters all these months. What is happening? What went wrong? It all began so assuringly. Jesus read Isaiah 61:1 and 2a, and then He explained, according to verse 21, that today this Scripture has been fulfilled, that is I am the Messiah, I am the fulfillment of all messianic promises. And then He proceeded to expound the passage, recited there in verses 18 and 19. We know that He did that because in verse 21 it says, "He only began by saying, 'Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing,'" that was just how He started, then He gave the exposition of those passages and showed what they meant and how He fulfilled them. All we have here is just a summation. He was saying the Messiah was there in their midst and they were hearing Him speak. And He told them He had come to fulfill messianic prophecy, He had come to bring the favorable year of the Lord, which means the era of salvation, today is the day of salvation as the apostle Paul put it in writing to the Corinthians, the day of

salvation had come, it was there, it was fulfilled, He the Savior who would bring the salvation was standing in front of them and they were hearing His voice and looking at His face. He was there. And with Him came salvation to the poor, and the prisoners, and the blind, and the outcasts, the distressed, the oppressed, the downtrodden.

What did that sermon that He preach say? Well, that's what I told you last week. Salvation is available, it's available to those of you who confess your spiritual poverty, who confess your spiritual bondage, who confess your spiritual darkness, who confess your spiritual defeat. Many times the preacher had stood up in the synagogue and said, "The blessed hour of the Messiah is to come." Many times the preacher had said, "The people who are eyewitnesses of Messiah Himself will be greatly blessed." Many times the preacher had said, "The eyes who honored to look at the sight of Messiah are of all eyes most blessed and the ears who are honored to hear His voice of all hears most blessed." That was them. They were the blessed, the blessed of all nations, the blessed of all generations, it was in this generation that He came and out of all that generation, the blessed of people because it was to them that He came, to that small little group in that small town in that small synagogue. To them had come the Messiah of God, to them had come the Savior of the world with the message of salvation, a message of riches, a message of forgiveness, a message of eternal life, a message of release. It was now present, it was now in their midst. What a day...what a day. No Sabbath ever began so wondrously and no Sabbath ever ended so tragically.

It's actually shocking, it rivets you to the page to understand how could this have happened? How did it turn so badly? How could Jesus let it happen? At first His words settled well, look at verse 22, "All were speaking well of Him." Oh that doesn't mean they believed in Him as the Messiah, it just means that the buzz was positive, just rippling through that packed synagogue. It was positive. They were speaking well of Him. And what was behind that well speaking? Well they were in awe of the gracious words which were falling from His lips. I mean, there may have been some things that they were wondering about in His message. I mean, they must have...some of them must have wondered why He stopped reading there in verse 19...why did He stop reading in the middle of Isaiah 61:2, "The favorable year of the Lord," and He stopped when the rest of the verse said, "And the day of vengeance of our God?" Why did He leave the vengeance out? Some of them probably were wondering about that. Let me be very honest. They were very eager for Messiah's coming...honestly, they were as eager for the Messiah to come and wreak vengeance on their Gentile enemies as they were for Him to come and bring salvation to Israel. They hated their oppressors. It must have bothered some of them that Jesus stopped there and didn't say anything about the day of vengeance, after all, had John the Baptist himself in his ministry about which they all knew, John the Baptist had said, "When the Messiah comes He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with...what?...fire, an unquenchable fire of judgment." So even John had talked about that.

In fact, John himself was greatly perplexed because John the Baptist soon after the beginning of the ministry of Jesus was taken prisoner, he was put in prison by that pagan, wretched, wicked, vile man named Herod, John must have sat in prison and wondered when the Messiah was going to come and destroy Herod, when He was going to bring the vengeance of God on Herod, open the prison doors and let John out. And when Jesus didn't do that, when, in fact, Jesus didn't take vengeance on any of the ungodly people, whether they were Romans or whether they were apostate Jews, when there was none of that going on at all, John became concerned and eventually so confused that he took his own disciples, got word to them, sent them to Jesus to ask Him if He was really the Messiah because he wanted to know if He's the Messiah, where's the vengeance.

But Christ had no intention of overturning the power of Herod. He had no intention of kicking open the prison doors, of wreaking havoc and divine vengeance on the ungodly. This was the time for the age of salvation. The day of vengeance will come after the day of salvation.

And maybe there were some in the synagogue who were wondering why He didn't read that and comment on it. He didn't, because that was future. The day of salvation was present. He wasn't there for vengeance on anyone, He was there for salvation. And through His whole life He didn't express vengeance. He was there for salvation for anyone and everyone who recognized that they were poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed.

But more than wondering about that, that might have been a minor thing, they were really struck it says in verse 22 by the gracious words which were falling from His lips. Listen. Powerful orators have always been able to captivate people. Great speakers making great speeches have always won over the minds and hearts of their hearers. Let me put it to you simply. They just heard the greatest speaker who ever lived. There was never a preacher like Him. There was never an orator like Him. The words that fell from His lips were like words they had never heard from anyone ever. They were stunned by His ability to speak, and amazingly they hadn't heard Him speak and He had grown up in their midst. He had never taught, He never preached and when He did, they were in awe. He was the greatest preacher who ever opened His mouth, impeccable understanding of truth He possessed, pure and holy passion for that truth, flawless reasoning, accurate interpretation, unmatched dexterity with the language. They had never heard anything like it. They were literally stunned by it. They were astonished by it. And they were saying repeatedly, "Is this not Joseph's son?" Familiarity breeds its normal contempt. They couldn't equivocate on the majesty of His oratory. They couldn't equivocate on the masterful way in which He had communicated the message unlike anything they had ever, ever heard, not even close to anything they had ever heard. They knew that this was speech like there had never been. And what they couldn't understand was that they knew Him and this was just Joseph's son, or so they thought. They didn't even take into consideration that the Father out of heaven had said, "This is My beloved Son."

They never got over this, by the way. They never did. They never did. At the end of His year and a half ministry in Galilee, Jesus came back again to the synagogue in Nazareth and again they said, "This is Joseph's son and we know His mother and we know His sisters and we know His brothers, this can't be the Messiah." And He grew up and He didn't do any miracles and He didn't make any such claims and He didn't do any speaking and how could He now be the Messiah? They just couldn't get it.

At this point they are in awe of His communication ability. And they are stirred, believe me, because they heard the truth presented as clearly as it could ever be presented. They understand exactly what He said and, believe me, they understand what He meant by what He said because He spoke so perfectly clear. And you know what the message to them was? Salvation is available for the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed. And they're the only ones who will be saved. They got the message. If they wanted salvation, they had to confess their spiritual destitution, their spiritual poverty, their spiritual blindness, their spiritual bondage, their spiritual oppression.

They weren't about to do that, are you kidding me? That is the last thing they were about to do. They were righteous. They were noble. They worshiped the true and living God. They went to the synagogue. They gave their tithes. They fasted. They were like that Luke 18 Pharisee. They were the people of God. They were like Paul, and I read it in Philippians 3, they were circumcised and they had their tribal pedigree and they were of the people of Israel and they were traditionalists and they were ceremonialists and they were zealous for the law and they kept the law as blamelessly as they could. They aren't the poor, the prisoners, the blind and the oppressed, that's got to be somebody else, the Gentiles.

And so, in self-defense they begin to think...the problem is not us, we just can't buy this message, how do we know He's the Messiah? And they just put up a wall. We don't know that He's the Messiah. And so Jesus reads their minds, that's what He did. That's not a problem for Him. Back in John 2 when He was in Judea it says that the people came to Him but He didn't commit Himself to them, John 2:24, because He knew what was in them. Omniscience, He read their minds. And so He says to them in verse 23, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your home town as well.'"

You see what they were doing? He knew, He read their minds. "I know what you're thinking," He said. You're saying, "We don't have any proof. The problem is, we don't have any proof. If You want us to believe in You, then, Physician, heal yourself. Don't You come tell us You're the doctor if we...if we don't have some proof."

So, that's what they want. You know, words of salvation were offered to them, forgiveness, good news, release, light, sight, but they had to be willing to admit they were the poor prisoners blind and oppressed. That is absolutely unthinkable...unthinkable. No such confession is ever going to rise out of their hearts, their hard hearts are filled with pride and self-righteousness and religiosity. They would never accept the fact that they were the poor prisoners blind and oppressed. And Jesus knew that because Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that.

And you know what? It was never a question of miracles. It's never a question of miracles ever because miracles don't prove anything about that. If Jesus did a miracle, does that prove that He could...listen carefully...save sinners? If Jesus did a miracle, is that proof that He can transfer people from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light? If He does a miracle, does that prove that He can save your soul from hell? If He does a miracle, does that prove that He can give you eternal life and take you to heaven? No. It doesn't prove that. You can take all the miracle workers, all the so-called miracle workers, all the demonic miracle workers from Jannes and Jambres and the Egyptian magicians, all the way down to Simon Magus in the New Testament, you can take all the oracles of Delphi and all the historical supposed black magicians and white magicians and bring them all together, you can take all the white hocus-pocus faith healers and TV evangelists, line them all up, have them do their whole gig of miracles and when they're all done with all their miracles whether they're true or false, they do not prove that Jesus Christ can save someone from hell.

And that's...that's...that was not the real issue with these people because they don't even question that Jesus can do miracles, all they want Him to do is to do in Nazareth what was done in Capernaum, twenty miles away. The word had come back of what He had done there. They didn't question that. They had reliable eye-witness accounts of what Jesus had done when He was there during that first year of ministry, He spent some time there. We don't know how many visits He made, we know of one in particular that is indicated in the second chapter of John, we also know in John 1 He was there to call some of His disciples. But He had done some miracles there as well as the miracle of the wedding at Cana when He made some wine out of nothing. And there were other miracles that occurred in Judea that must have been well-known to the Galileans who are often down there for Passover and other feasts. So the cumulated information about the miracles was growing and growing and nobody ever questioned that.

Let me tell you something as you study the New Testament. Never does the Jewish population or the Jewish leaders question Jesus' miracles, never. They never question them. In John 11:47 the Pharisees, the Chief Priests said, "This man is doing miracles." They never questioned that. That was not a question in their minds. This is not an honest question...Please, we would like to believe in You, prove You're Messiah...we would like to believe that You can take the spiritually poor and make them rich, the spiritually bound and make them free, the spiritually blind and make them see, the spiritually oppressed and fearful and deliver them, we'd like to believe that, could You please spin up

in the air and do a cartwheel or two in space and come back down? That doesn't prove anything.

They knew He did miracles, they even say it. "Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in Your home town as well." They're not questioning that He did them, they know He did them. They're saying..."Do them here." There was not an honest issue of evidence. They were unsympathetic to His message which was that if you want to have salvation, you've got to see your spiritual bankruptcy, and your spiritual destitution and the true condition of your heart. They were unsympathetic to that, they were too proud, too self-righteous, they were too skeptical because they were in a self-defense mode. And so Jesus says, "I know exactly what you're saying, in your mind you're saying...Physician, heal yourself?" This was a proverb that was well known, it's actually the Greek word *parabole* which means parable, but *parabole* has a broad meaning, it could include a proverb or an axiom, and it's a fair axiom. I mean, it's a normal thing. If you're going to trust somebody to be a physician, you want some proof that he can...he can heal. And so that's what they say. It's a way of saying...prove your claims before we're going to believe on You, before we're going to believe that You're the Messiah, You better do some miracles here like You did down there in Capernaum. And there may have been a little bit of town rivalry going on as well, Capernaum was only 20 miles away. And what they're saying is...You know, it's not our fault that we don't believe, Jesus, it's Your fault, it's all in Your control, it's Your fault if we don't believe, You just haven't done enough here to prove this, we just need more evidence.

I have to say as a footnote here, all of this supposed miracle-working stuff that these modern-day supposed healers do has absolutely no bearing on the gospel. I don't know what they think they're accomplishing by falsifying miracles as if falsifying miracles somehow is going to cause people to believe in Jesus Christ. It isn't, it doesn't, it didn't. Jesus banished disease from the whole land of Palestine and they put Him on a cross. It doesn't.

What it does do is affirm the faith of those who believe, but it does nothing for those who don't because no miracles can prove that Jesus can save the sinner from hell. They don't want the salvation He offers if the terms are to admit that you are the poor and you're the prisoners and you're the blind and you're the oppressed. He says, "You want Me to do what was over there, but that's not because you really care to have proof, this is your way of self-justification." You're saying, "Well, why should we believe Him, after all, we don't have any proof that He's the Messiah." They had plenty. They could have proven that He was the Messiah in an instant. They chose not to. They chose to throw up a smoke screen in their minds and Jesus read their minds.

In verse 24 He says, "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his home town." Amen is what the word is in the Greek, I solemnly assure you. It's an idiom for "I'm telling you the truth, this is really true, no prophet is welcome in his home town, no prophet is *dektos*, accepted in his home town." All experts are from out of town, aren't they? It's more of that "Familiarity breeds contempt." You know, there's a bit of a concession here, I think Jesus is making a bit of a concession. He's saying to them,

"I can see that it's hard for you to get pass the fact that I'm a local guy, that I grew up here and that I am Joseph's son and Mary's boy and that this is my synagogue and you saw me here all those years of my life. I understand that." There's a bit of a concession there. And I think there's a bit of...there's a bit of mercy in that in Jesus' case. I understand that no prophet is welcome in his home town, that, by the way, is a phrase He repeated a year and a half later when He came back again to that synagogue, He says the same thing as recorded in Matthew 13:57 and Mark 6:4. He also used it as recorded in John 4:44. So there were a number of times when He referred to this.

And as I said, it is a concession. I understand that humanly speaking that that's a factor, I understand that...human nature. But at this point, He makes a brilliant transition, and, folks, I want you to listen carefully. What you're about to hear is profound. He makes a transition. Speaking of unwelcome prophets, speaking of a prophet not welcome, let me talk to you, verse 25, about Elijah, verse 27, let me talk to you about Elisha. Two prophets in Israel unwelcomed, hated, rejected, refused by the people. Speaking of prophets that were unwelcome, I remind you of Elijah and Elisha. Let's see what He says, verse 25.

"And I say to you in truth," very much like the prior statement in verse 24, "Truly I say to you." These are statements indicating great importance. "I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah." Let me tell you about the days of Elijah for a minute. They all knew Elijah, the great prophet of Israel. They all knew him. And in his day, his ministry around 850 B.C. there were many widows. Sure death was frequent, men died in wars. There were many widows. And in the days of Elijah there were not only many widows, but there was Baal worship everywhere because the king was a man named Ahab. Remember him? He had married a woman named Jezebel. Jezebel was a Gentile. Jezebel was a Gentile Baal worshiper. Ahab became a Baal worshiper, a worshiper of Baal, his wife led that. The whole of Israel became idolatrous, started worshiping Baal. Ahab was so bad, 1 Kings 16 says, "He did more to anger God than all the kings of Israel before him." He was a wretched, wicked king who worshiped Baal. His wife worshiped Baal. He led all of Israel to worship Baal. So here's Elijah, he's in the midst of this. The whole nation is worshiping Baal. There are many widows.

Elijah comes on the scene in 1 Kings 17. He just drops out of nowhere. And the first thing that he does is he announces a drought. Jesus said here in verse 25 that the sky was shut up for three and...three years and six months. It doesn't say that in 1 Kings, it does say that here and it says it in James 5:17, it refers to the same occasion, so we know it was a three and a half year drought. No rain in Israel for three and a half years. The result, the end of verse 25, "When a great famine came over all the land." You've got a lot of widows in the land. Now God cares about widows. There's all kinds of instruction in the Old Testament to take care of widows. Exodus 22, Deuteronomy 10, through the Psalms, Isaiah 1, many, many places and God has a special heart for widows. God in Psalm 68:5 is called "The God who is the defender of widows." Psalm 146:9, "God, the Lord who

relieves widows." And He instructed the people to care for the widows and that was a very important part of living out godly righteous life. Even in the New Testament, the New Testament enjoins upon Christians to take care of widows because they are of particular care in the mind of God. So God cared for widows. So it's a time in Israel, apostate, they're worshiping Baal, they've turned from the true God, the true and living God, they're worshiping false gods. There are many widows. God sends a judgment on Ahab, a judgment on Israel and it's a three and a half year drought. Now a three and a half year drought produces a famine, people start to die. The people who are at the bottom of the food chain are the widows because they're charity cases. The people dependent on charity suffer the worst because the people who give to charity only have enough to survive. So the people at the end of the food chain get nothing, so widows are on the brink of death. Widows are dying, the special care of God are these widows, not enough food to feed your own children let alone to give it away to some widow. That is the situation. That is a judgment of God. First Kings 17, that judgment comes through Elijah, he drops on the scene out of nowhere and he announces this judgment. The judgment comes and it is a judgment on the idolatry, the Baal worship of Ahab and the people of Israel.

Now it says, verse 26, "And Elijah was sent to none of them." You know, the Jews didn't like this story, I can tell you, and as Jesus starts to tell it, they start to get angry. Why is He bringing that ugly story up? God, the God of the fatherless and the widow, God, the God who cares about the widows, there was a famine in the land for three and a half years and the people were dying and the widows were dying and God never cared for any of the widows. We don't like that story at all. They were familiar, believe me, with 1 Kings 17, very familiar with it. And if you think that was bad, that Elijah was sent to none of those Jewish widows, this was worse. He was sent to Zarephath in the land of Sidon to a woman who was a widow there. Now this is worse. Why? This woman in the land of Sidon...hang on...is a Gentile. It's bad enough to be a woman in Jewish tradition at this time, it's far worse to be a Gentile woman. But to come from Sidon, that is unthinkable. How could God ignore the Jews of Israel? But then how could He possibly send His prophet to go minister to a Gentile widow in, of all places, Sidon? Sidon was Gentile territory on the north coast of Israel, Tyre and Sidon, the two familiar cities. Tyre and Sidon in that Gentile region, Zarephath was a town in between the two, Tyre and Sidon, a Phoenician city. The area was the home...this is even more amazing...the area was the home of the father of Jezebel. You know what his name was? Ethbaal, he was so devoted to Baal He named himself after Baal. Ethbaal means "Baal is alive." And Ethbaal was such a wicked man he murdered his predecessor and he was a priest as well as being a king, he was the king of Phoenicia, Tyre and Sidon, he was the king, he was a Baal-worshiping king, he was also a priest in the temple of Melcarte(?) and Astarte, two of the deities in the pantheon of Baal worship. This is the most wretched thing imaginable. This is the father of the apostasy...the apostasy, in a sense, in Israel because he's the father of Jezebel who came and polluted Israel worship when she married Ahab, and so forth. And so here God sends His prophet to a woman from the home region of Jezebel, a Gentile widow. That famine...that area, by the way, was also affected

by the famine. Food supply was low. Well, if you go back to 1 Kings 17, I don't have time, you're going to hang with me now, another few minutes, because we can't break this off, I'm not going to get to speak to you for a while, we've got to cover this, this is so powerful.

God sends Elijah in the midst of all this famine over to Zarephath to this widow. So if you look at 1 Kings 17 you see the story. God sends Elijah in this midst of all this famine over to Zarephath, to this widow. This is a widow who believes in the true God. The text of 1 Kings 17 indicates that. She says, "The Lord God of Israel lives." She gives testimony. Somebody had witnessed to her about the true God of Israel and she trusted in the true God of Israel. She is a pagan Gentile widow in the midst of a pagan godless area but believes in the true and living God. And so to her goes the prophet of God rather than to Israelites. Her food supply was down to one little bit of flour and one little bit of oil, enough to make one cake, right? One scone, if you will, one biscuit. And the prophet comes to her and you can read the story in 1 Kings 17, I wish we had time to do it, we don't. And he says to her, first of all, "Can you get me some water?" And then he says when she's going to get the water, "Can you also take what you have left and make me a meal?" Huh....this is a stranger, she's never met this guy in her entire life, he walks in and says, "Take what you've got, that's all you've got and make me a meal, I am the man of God, I am from the God of Israel." She knows the God of Israel lives, she says it, "The Lord God of Israel lives." Well, I'm from the God of Israel and I'm going to ask you, if you will, to take all that you have left, your last meal before you die, starve to death, and she had a son as well, and give it to me.

Now, you know, if she had been in the synagogue at Nazareth, she would have probably said, "Oh no, no, no. Aha, not on your life. How do I know you're a man of God? How do I know whether you're going to take that one thing and you're going to do with that one thing something that's going to provide for me all the rest of my life? How do I know that I can trust you? Could you please fly up in the air and spin around, could you do a few healings? Could you do some magic somewhere, I need to see something so that I can believe?"

That wouldn't have proved anything if he had spun up in the air and done some amazing things, if he had done some healings or whatever, it wouldn't have proved anything. The only way she would ever know whether God would supply all she ever needed was to take the little that she had and trusted it to him. She figured that out, by the way, she wasn't in the synagogue in Nazareth and it was probably a good thing or she might have been influenced by the crowd attitude. She probably thought like this, "Well, I only have one little cup left, one little bit of oil, that's all I've got. If I give it to him and he is a man of God, then I'll have life. And if he's not, I'll just have one less meal and die half a day sooner. I'm going to die anyway, what have I got to lose?" Pretty good thinking, isn't it? "All I've got is one meal left. I'm destitute. I'm desperate. I'm in poverty. I don't know where to turn. If I don't trust the God of Israel who lives, if I don't trust the man of God, I'm dead anyway, what's half a day longer? But if he is the man of God, and if God did send him, then I have life." The only way she

would ever know was not if he went up in the air and spun around a few times, not if he went out and healed some people, the only way she would ever know that the God of Israel would give her all she would ever need was if she took what she had in her poverty and trusted him with it. She did.

And you remember the story? She made the little cake, the prophet ate it and the next thing that happened was her barrel was never empty. Remember that? It just was supernaturally filled all the time. And the cruel of oil was never empty, it just kept getting filled and filled and filled. That's an analogy of spiritual life and supply. She took the little that she had, she gave it to the man of God and in return she got life, permanent life. And then...and then the Lord did another amazing thing. Her son got sick and died, remember? And he raised her son from the dead just because she trusted the tiny bit that she had. She knew that she was the poor, the prisoner, blind and the oppressed. And Jesus was saying to those Jews, "Let me tell you something, you may be Jews, you may be part of Israel, you may be the people of the covenants and the people of the Messiah, but I'll tell you this, God will save an outcast Gentile widow who admits her spiritual destitution before He'll save you."

Let me tell you this, folks. There's only one reason why people who know the gospel don't accept Christ. It is because they do not see themselves as the poor, the blind, the prisoners and the oppressed. Do you see it? That's always the problem. It's always the problem.

She knew her condition. She knew her condition. Salvation has always been that way, folks. It's always been that God will save Jew or Gentile when they come to a point of spiritual destitution and they know it. And she would only know if that was the man of God if she trusted him.

Now listen to this very carefully. You know how the Jews in the synagogue that day that they could have known that Jesus was Messiah? Oh they said, "Do some things like You did down there. Heal some people, do some, you know..." No that wasn't... You know how they could have known if Jesus was the Messiah? Very simple, admit their sin, ask Him to save them and see if He did it, right? That's the issue. You want to know whether Jesus can save you from hell? Ask Him. Give Him your life, that's the only way you'll ever know. You can see all the miracles under the sun, false miracles or whatever, you can see the whole parade of stuff, it's not going to convince you. There's only one way to know that Jesus can save your soul from hell and change your life and send you to eternal heaven with all your sins forgiven and that is to take your meager little wicked life and hand it over to Him and see what He does with it.

And Jesus wasn't finished. They didn't like this at all. They're getting angrier by the moment. They don't even like the fact that He's telling these stories. Verse 27, "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, the prophet." Elisha followed Elijah and that was a time, 850 to 790 B.C., disease was a major problem. Leprosy is a sort of a categorical word. It's a broad term. It identifies various ancient skin diseases, everything from superficial diseases to serious diseases. It may also include

what is today called leprosy, but really by that most people mean Hansen's disease, but it included all kinds of diseases of the skin described in Leviticus 13. They tended to be disfiguring diseases, usually contagious diseases. They made the victim unclean, cut off from all fellowship, all social activity, cut off from the families and isolated because of the Contagem that was believed to be a part of these diseases, and Israel had many, many such people with these diseases, many of them. It was in the time of Elisha, and they didn't like Elisha, he didn't have any honor in his own...in his own country anymore than Elijah did. The people were still worshipping Baal, they were still turning their backs on the true and living God and along came leprosy everywhere and in verse 27, "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet and none of them was cleansed but only Naaman the Syrian." Oh, man, did they hate this story.

Now what's wrong with Naaman? Naaman was a commander-in-chief of a section known as Aram. He was a soldier. He was a...he was a big-time soldier. He commanded a set of troops that were always raiding Israel. They would come across the border and they would fight and they would terrorize and raid Israel and they would take prisoners and haul the prisoners back to Syria. He was a Gentile. He was a Gentile and worse than that, he was a leper, he had leprosy, he was unclean, he was despicable on every count. On one of his raids he took captive, this is in the stories in 2 Kings 5 the first fourteen verses, you can read it yourself, he took back this girl, one of his captives and she became a servant in his house to help his wife. She had a great attitude, she knew about his leprosy and she said to him, "You need to go find the man of God, Elisha, because God can heal you." And you know what happened? He began to believe in the power of the God of Israel and so eventually through some situations, I won't go into all of it, he wound up meeting Elisha. Here is an enemy, a Gentile, somebody who has sacked and attacked and killed and plundered Israel and he's a leper...this is the outcast of all outcasts. And Elisha says to him, "The God of Israel is willing to heal you, all you have to do is go over to the river and go down seven times." One preacher titled a sermon on this, "Seven ducks in a dirty pond," and that's essentially...that's essentially what he told him to do. Go over there in this dirty river and just duck yourself seven times. And he said..."I'll..." he was furious, he was a man of honor and a man of stature and a man of dignity and a man of nobility and he isn't going to humble himself in some kind of humiliating deal and go dump himself down seven times in some dirty river. He even says, "We have clean rivers in my area, I'm not going in your dirty river."

So he goes back and his servant says, "Well, better a dirty river and a clean Naaman, huh?" And he starts to think about it and he had second thoughts. And he realizes his desperation and he realizes there's no relief and there's no cure and there's no healing and there's nothing except the God of Israel. Is the man of God really the man of God? Is God really truly God? Is this really His prophet? How will I ever know that? How am I going to know that that's true unless I do what He says? I have to take my desperation, my destitution, my disease, I have to go over there, I have to do what the man tells me to do. If I do what the man tells me to do, then I'll know whether he's the man of God, right?

So he goes over there and he does his seven ducks in a dirty river and guess what? Clean! Oh boy, you're sitting in the synagogue, you're saying, "This is not going well. So we are worse than a Gentile widow from Jezebel's home town. We are worse than a Syrian Gentile leper. This is intolerable."

In verse 28, "All in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things." Let me tell you something, there's nothing worse than spiritual pride, is there? You know, the Lord had said, "You know, I come to save, this is it. But I can only save the poor, and the prisoners and the blind and the oppressed. That's all I can save and it doesn't matter whether they are a Gentile woman or if they're a Syrian leper, it doesn't matter who it is, it just matters that they see their bankruptcy, their destitution, and they come to Me like the man who said, 'Lord, I believe, but could You help my unbelief?' And they may not know everything there is to know and their faith may not be full, but if they'll just come in their desperation and say, 'I don't have a choice, here's all I have and see what I can do with it.' Then they'll know that I'm the Messiah, right?"

You didn't know either and neither did I until I gave Him my life. Then I knew. And you could have paraded before me an infinite number of miracles, they wouldn't have proved anything. You will never know whether Jesus can save your soul from hell, give you new life, recreate your soul, plant His Holy Spirit there, forgive your sin and send you to heaven until you give your life to Him.

All they could think about was that they were below Gentiles. They didn't even want these stories to be rehearsed again, they didn't like these stories. And they're so angry with Him because He's insistent on the fact that unless they humble themselves like a Syrian leper, unless they see themselves as no better than a Syrian leper, no better than a pagan Gentile woman, unless they see themselves as no better than outcasts, they aren't going to get saved. And that is absolutely intolerable to them, to go to someone who is a life-long Jew, a life-long attender of the synagogue, a serious devout Jew and say, "You're no better off than a pagan, you're no better off than an outcast Gentile leper," is unthinkable because they're so committed to the self-righteousness that's a part of a work system.

And so, it says in verse 29, "They rose up," all of a sudden bedlam broke loose in the crowded synagogue. They cast Him out of the city. They grabbed Him and in mob violence like a lynch mob, they roared out of the city, led Him to the brow of the hill in which their city had been built, Nazareth sits on a hill, many hills on the hill but it's up a slope...we don't know what brow of it, they found a place, a brow of a hill in which the city had been built in order to throw Him down the cliff. Deuteronomy 13 said that if you have a false prophet, you can do that, kill him. They were so entrenched in their self-righteousness, so unwilling to see their sin that when Jesus, the Messiah they had waited for for so long, the Savior of the world came, they tried to kill Him because He threatened their self-righteousness. There's only one reason why people who know the truth of Jesus don't

believe, it is because they do not see themselves as the poor, prisoners, blind and oppressed. You see that? Because you can't be saved if you don't. God offers nothing to people who are content with their own condition, except judgment.

In their minds they were the respectable. They were the godly, the chosen, the true worshipers, the legalists, the ceremonialists, the covenantalists. These other people were wretched, destitute outcasts, they couldn't see themselves as spiritual lepers. They refused to admit it and they were His relatives and His friends and His neighbors. How could you...they were His relatives and His friends and His neighbors? Yeah, and they tried to kill Him. They hated that message so violently because they would not be humiliated. You can't get saved unless you're willing to be humiliated and realize your sinful condition. Again I say, take all the healers, line them up, let them heal all the sick, that doesn't prove that Jesus can forgive sin, just give your life to Him, He'll prove He can.

They tried to kill Him but it wasn't His time. Verse 30, instant calm, "But passing through their midst He went His way." We don't know how that happened. Some miraculous way He just.....was gone. If they wanted proof, all they needed to do was ask Him to save them from their sins, but they had to admit their sins and they wouldn't.

How about you? Those are the only people He can save. Let's pray.

Father, this is such a powerful, powerful statement of the mission of the Messiah to save sinners. May He in grace save many sinners even today. We pray in His name. Amen.

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