

## **Busy Times**

We're getting ready to kick off a busy season in the life of our church. Later this afternoon Kendra, the girls, and I will be heading over to Columbus to meet Bishop Jung and the Cabinet, to receive our Go Grant for the AED and CPR dummies. And next week is Super Bowl Sunday. Keep bringing your nonperishable food items and canned goods – we have a goal of 2000 food items, but it doesn't look like we're very close to that yet.

All the food we collect will go to the Agape Food Pantry to feed people here in Shelby County. And then, we'll have a fellowship meal after worship, and a football toss – and all the money we raise will go to Agape to buy more food. I know the Super Bowl is down to the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles, but the big winner – from our view – is the people of Shelby County who'll get food from Agape at no cost to them.

A couple members of the District Committee on Ordained Ministry will be here on February 18, to meet with me. And March 5 is Ash Wednesday, which is the beginning of Lent. We'll have a worship service here on that evening. We're going to be busy, church. I hope you take the opportunity to "dive in" with both feet – to the hard work which we do best when we do it together!

Last week we started talking about Jesus preaching in His hometown of Nazareth. We only got about half of the story. Today we're going to finish that story – it goes great with the Jeremiah text we heard a few minutes ago – Jeremiah was a young man, didn't feel real confident about speaking on God's behalf, but what God needed Jeremiah to say is echoed by Jesus in Nazareth. It's a call to repentance. So, if you have your Bible or a Bible app handy, turn with me to Luke 4:21-30. **Read Luke 4:21-30.**

## **Isn't This Joseph's Son?**

Looking back a few verses, Jesus has just read a passage from the Book of Isaiah, about being called to "proclaim good news to the poor, proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor," (Luke 4:18-19). In a nutshell, that's Jesus' mission statement. And then something remarkable happens. Luke says, "He [Jesus] began by saying to them, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,'" (Luke 4:21).

The very next thing we hear is that "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," (verse 22). Now, you could take that comment about being Joseph's son in at least two different ways. You could take it as, "Who does He think He is? Isn't He the son of Joseph the carpenter?" So basically, showing a lot of contempt towards Him. Or you could take it in the opposite direction. "Wow! Jesus is a great speaker, where has He been to get that skill, since he's the carpenter's son?" I tend to think, at least at the

outset, that this is the view. Luke even states that “everyone spoke well of Him and were amazed.”

See, they like what they hear. He speaks and reads well, He’s confident, and perhaps they’ve heard of some of the things He’s done in other locations. And, the Isaiah text He read, and we looked at earlier in the chapter, speaks to their hearts. They know what He’s saying.

### **No Prophet is Accepted in His Hometown**

They read the Isaiah text, and they think it applies to them. They’re poor. They’re captives and oppressed by the rule of Rome. Perhaps He is the long-awaited Messiah! Maybe He’ll do some of the same things in His hometown that He’s done elsewhere. Why not? He’s one of the hometown boys, after all. Maybe He’ll even launch the rebellion against Rome from there, and Nazareth will finally have a reason to be on the map – “The Hometown of Jesus, Liberator of the Jewish Nation!”

See, they’re willing to accept Jesus as Messiah – but only on their terms. And Jesus is more than just an ordinary human like us. He’s also fully God. He knew what they were thinking. He tells them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to Me: ‘Physician, heal Yourself!’ And you will tell Me, ‘Do here in Your hometown what we have heard that You did in Capernaum,’” (verse 23). See, we can’t accept Him on our terms – we have to recognize that He accepts us on His terms. Throughout the Gospel record, Jesus never tells the people what they want to hear. He told them the truth.

People don’t like hearing the truth, especially when it conflicts with their notions. Jesus tells them, “No prophet is accepted in His hometown,” (verse 24). He recognizes that the people aren’t ready to hear the whole truth – many times we think we’re ready for the whole truth, but we’re not. What Jesus does next gets the people so worked up in the synagogue, that they were ready to literally kill Him on the Sabbath.

### **The Widow and the Soldier**

He says, “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,” (verses 25-26). It’s a story that comes straight out of the Old Testament. In the story about Elijah, the famine in Israel was so bad that God had him leave the country and go live at the home of a widow, who happens to be preparing a final meal for her and her son when Elijah arrives. Elijah convinces the widow to bake him a small loaf of bread – probably about the size of a biscuit – before fixing anything for her son and herself. She listens, and as she pours the last of her olive oil and flour into the dish to make Elijah’s bread, a miraculous thing happens. Elijah tells her that God says, “The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land,” (1 Kgs. 17:14).

By the way, the widow of Zarephath was a Gentile. She wasn’t Jewish. See, Jesus talking about her long ago on that Sabbath day in the synagogue got the good, religious people of Nazareth a little hot under the collar. Jesus goes on. “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,” (Luke 4:27).

Naaman was from Syria. He was in the army of the king of Aram-Damascus. So, he’s a Gentile. Do you see the point Jesus is making here? God’s grace is freely given to people – and sometimes it’s not to the “chosen” people, but rather, to those who recognize they have a need of it more so than the righteous. The folks in the synagogue got the message loud and clear – and they didn’t like it! These stories came right out of their Bible, but they didn’t like them.

### **Cherry-Picking Verses**

It’s better to just skip those sections which make them uncomfortable and keep the ones that make God fit in the box we create for Him. See, they’d rather cherry-pick the verses and books that fit their notions, rather than focusing on the whole truth. There are a lot of people in the Church who very much enjoy cherry-picking verses to condemn the sisters and brothers rather than looking at the whole book and see that they’re called to show God’s mercy and grace to all people. They may look and act very different than us, but Jesus took the nails for them, too.

God’s grace – and this is the point that Jesus was making – God’s grace has always been there, and He’s given it to other people when the Jews wouldn’t accept it. So why wouldn’t the Jews accept it? Why doesn’t the Church today accept it? Because to receive God’s grace, we have to repent. We have to give up what we want and do what God wants.

And for some people, giving up what we want is too great a cost for them. So, they pay lip service. They say they follow Jesus. They may come to a few services each year. They’re lukewarm. Church, do you know what Jesus thinks about that? He tells us what He thinks in Revelation 3:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of My mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with Me, (Rev. 3:15-20).

### **Be On Fire for Jesus**

If your Bible shows Jesus’ words in red letters, and you look up those verses, they’re red letters. He said it. I don’t ever want to be lukewarm for Jesus. That’s a terrible, terrible thing for a Christian to do. We have to be on fire for Him all the time. We should be constantly living like it’s the last day of our lives here, ready to meet Him

face-to-face. Some people like iced coffee, it's okay. I like it better hot! But sometimes, like partway through the sermon, my coffee gets lukewarm, and that's the worst. I drink it quick because lukewarm coffee's terrible. Don't be lukewarm!

I suspect a lot of the good religious Jews in the synagogue at Nazareth fell into the lukewarm category. The folks in the synagogue were furious with Jesus after hearing Him talk about these two Bible stories, and how God was merciful to Gentiles. Notice what the religious folks in the synagogue did. Luke says, "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," (Luke 4:29).

Can you imagine that? Going from being in a worship service to wanting to lynch the Man because they didn't like what He had to say? I said it last week, and I'll say it again, people are fickle! The thing about the Gentiles Jesus talks about in the Gospel lesson – the widow and Naaman – is they knew they needed help.

They were desperate for help. And who shows up in their desperation? God does. And He met their needs – for provision, and for healing. Both of them recognized they weren't deserving of God's help – they knew they weren't God's "chosen" people.

But God's people, when they rejected grace over and over – look what happened to them. They became furious. They intended to murder Jesus by throwing Him off a cliff. At times, we become furious as well and would like nothing better than to throw someone off a cliff – especially when the perspective they have is not the same as ours. In doing so, we reject and deny our need for grace. We push it off the cliff instead of embracing or jumping into it. And instead of grace upon grace filling us up, it becomes loss upon loss as we dig our own pits.

**Prayer:** O God, in a cynical and despairing world, let us proclaim Your hope. In a violent and angry world, help us proclaim Your peace. In a dismissive and disinterested world, help us proclaim Your compassion. In a lonely and inhospitable world, help us proclaim Your love. In a grieving and weeping world, help us proclaim Your joy. May we be so captivated by You, that we cannot help but to speak, sing, and put into action the message of Your reign which is always coming into our world.