

Jesus: Rejection at Home

Luke 4:14-30

Sermon

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Jesus Rejected at Nazareth

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¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
¹⁹ and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.*"

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* **4:18–19** Or *and to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*. Isa 61:1–2 (Greek version); 58:6.

¹ Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Lk 4:14–30). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. TODAY

A. WE ARE GOING TO CONTINUE ALONG IN THE EARLY LIFE AND MINISTRY OF JESUS

1. After his baptism, and beginning to gather some disciples, he was tempted in the wilderness
2. He then began his active ministry

B. WE ARE GOING TO PICK UP THE STORY WHEN HE SPOKE IN THE LOCAL SYNAGOGUE IN HIS HOME TOWN OF NAZARETH

1. What we see and hear in this passage frames and outlines Jesus' future ministry
 - a) And it gives us a good insight into why he came, and the life and ministry he has called us to share in even today
 - b) Particularly the way he came to free people, and how the good news isn't just for us but even for those we view as our enemies

C. PRAYER

BODY:

A. JESUS HAS JUST BEGUN HIS MINISTRY

1. He has been baptised, and God has made clear that Jesus is his beloved Son
 - a) Jesus has then been subject to various temptations by the devil in the wilderness
2. These temptations largely focus on getting Jesus to abandon his faithful relationship with the Father, and to seek to deal with life and rulership on earth independently from the Father

- a) In this Jesus is facing the same sorts of temptations that man has succumbed to since the garden of Eden

B. LUKE

1. The author of the gospel is writing to predominantly Gentile Christians later in the first century
 - a) They have suffered greatly at the hands of Jews who have in turn suffered greatly at the hands of the Romans
2. Luke is making clear to them that Jesus also suffered at the hands of those who should have treated him the best
 - a) That his own people refused to hear him because they wouldn't accept who Jesus was, and the type of Messiah he was, and his way of bringing freedom and peace

Luke 4:14-19

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C. AT THIS POINT HIS POPULARITY IS HIGH

1. People like him and what he is doing and saying
2. Remember, they are poor and desperate
 - a) They have been under Roman rule for quite some time, and they are looking for the Messiah to come and free them

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¹⁸ "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor."

3. This passage shows that the work of the kingdom, the good news of setting the captives, the blind and the oppressed free, is a work of the Trinity
 - a) The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord sends the "Servant", the one talking in the first person as "me".

He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
¹⁹ and that the time of the LORD's favor has come.*"

D. WHAT JESUS HAS READ FROM ISAIAH SUMS UP WHO HE WAS, AND WHAT HE HAD COME TO DO

1. It tells us a lot about God, the Father, Son and Spirit, and about the mission the Triune God has sent the Son, the anointed one, the Messiah to carry out

²⁰ He rolled up the scroll, handed it back to the attendant, and sat down. All eyes in the synagogue looked at him intently.
²¹ Then he began to speak to them. "The Scripture you've just heard has been fulfilled this very day!"

- a) This is the good news, the mission of God, the mission Jesus continued on to fulfil, and has called his people to share in

E. IT IS SIGNIFICANT THAT JESUS OMITS THE LAST PART OF THE QUOTE HE USES FROM ISAIAH 61:2,

² He has sent me to tell those who mourn
that the time of the LORD's favor has come,*
and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies.

1. Later, as we are going to see, Jesus continues to de-emphasize Isaiah's focus on punishing those outside of Israel.
 - a) These people in the synagogue, and the rest of the Jews, had suffered terribly at the hands of Gentiles through the years, and now were suffering under the Romans.
 - b) They looked for freedom and for punishment of their enemies, particularly those in some of the neighbouring cities like Sepphoris that had pledged loyalty to Rome rather than God

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* **61:2** Or *to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*.

(1) They saw things as very much an “us versus them” situation

c) They were the good guys, and the Gentiles the bad guys who deserved to be severely dealt with

2. The passage from Isaiah is most likely talking about the Messiah finally bringing about the year of Jubilee, which was quite likely due at that very time

a) They were expecting Jesus to fulfil what Isaiah said, and to bring them freedom from captivity and punishment of their Gentile enemies.

3. As Jesus had just read;

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the LORD is upon me,
for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released,
that the blind will see,
that the oppressed will be set free,
¹⁹ and that the time of the LORD’s favor has come.*”

4. V .19 is often translated, “*and to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,*” which is most likely the year of Jubilee, that was supposed to take place every 50 years, but had never been put into practice.

a) In the Jubilee year all slave and prisoners were to be released and all debts cancelled, and all land given back to the proper hereditary owners.

5. Fred Kane writes;

Apparently during the whole history of Israel this never happened. ...the Isaiah Scroll suggests that the only way this law will ever be enforced is if God sends a special Servant-with-a-capital-"S" to force it to happen.

So here you have the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Here you have a law that's supposed to reset the game back to zero, and start everyone out with equal opportunity, and it never happens.

* **4:18–19** Or *and to proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD*. Isa 61:1–2 (Greek version); 58:6.

Here you have peasants living next to the city they fear and despise, the city that keeps them slaves, remembering that their parents revolted against it, and telling their kids stories so that a generation later those kids will rush in and try to destroy it. And to this angry mob Jesus reads a scripture about that great jubilee event, the end of oppression, and says, "today it's happening."

Wow! What do you suppose they were thinking? Something like, "Our old home boy is a miracle worker! He's going to lead the revolution!

We're setting the slaves free! Let's get our pitchforks and machetes, let's get our gasoline cans and Molotov cocktails, and burn Sepphoris to the ground!"

Except!

Except Jesus leaves out a line. ... "the day of vengeance of our God," Jesus leaves that out! He leaves out the good part, the part about revenge, the part about punishment, the part about our enemies getting it in the neck. It's like watching *The Wizard of Oz*, only Dorothy doesn't get to throw the water on the witch! ..They were willing to sit through a whole church service if they could hear the word "vengeance," "revenge," and Jesus leaves it out.²

F. LUKE IS REFRAMING AND AMENDING THE EXPECTATIONS THE PEOPLE HAD OF JESUS

1. In this chapter, Luke is showing that Jesus is indeed the Messiah they were expecting, but he wasn't going to act as they expected
 - a) It is important that we today are also clear about what sort of Messiah Jesus is
 - b) And let the Holy Spirit lead us to accept those things about his approach that we don't naturally naturally feel comfortable or agree with
2. Brian MacLaren; in *Everything Must Change*,

Jesus claims to be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord to do what these words said: proclaim good news to the poor (... the Roman Empire, through taxation, created a new class of poor tenant farmers), proclaim freedom for prisoners (likely implying those who are held against their will under Rome's imperial control), and, proclaim new sight for the blind (with blindness

² Fred Kane, 'Quit Preachin' and Gone to Meddlin', Luke 4:14-30. Sermon, February 1, 2004, PRCL-L@LISTSERV.LOUISVILLE.EDU

referring to his physical healings, or perhaps to the removal of blindness that would come through his insightful teaching, or both).

He would also proclaim the year of the Lord's favor — referring to the Jubilee year, when all are to be released from debt and lands are returned to the families that had owned them in the past, relevant on many levels for people whose lands had been seized both by the Romans and by opportunistic fellow Jews.³

G. THE EMPHASIS IS ON FREEING THE OPPRESSED

1. That is the central mission of Jesus

- a) Whereas the Romans used crosses to punish, to control and bring everyone into their kingdom, and instill fear and submission,
- b) Jesus and his kingdom works the opposite way
- c) as MacLaren says,

Jesus' alternative framing story, as we've seen, involves God's bringing down those in power (Luke 1:52-53) so that the poor can be legitimized (Luke 4:18), and so that the religious collaboration with the empire can be exposed as hypocrisy. The empire uses crosses to punish rebels and instill fear and submission in the oppressed: Jesus will use a cross to expose the cruelty and injustice of those in power and instill hope and confidence in the oppressed.⁴

- d) And in doing this, Jesus doesn't just look after his own group, his own family, friends and nation and help them reverse the direction of the oppression

(1) He came to free all people everywhere from oppression and control by others, and to give them sight, sight of God's new and revolutionary ways

³ Brian MacLaren; Everything Must Change, p.123-124

⁴ Brian MacLaren, p. 123.124

II. LUKE 4:22-30 REJECTION

A. LUKE 4:22

²² Everyone spoke well of him and was amazed by the gracious words that came from his lips. “How can this be?” they asked. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”

1. We tend to expect local people to be ordinary and it can be a big surprise when someone we know turns out to be outstanding in ways we didn’t see before

²³ Then he said, “You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: ‘Physician, heal yourself’—meaning, ‘Do miracles here in your hometown like those you did in Capernaum.’

2. Craig Evans;

In v. 23 Jesus demonstrates that he understands what the people expect of him. The proverb “Physician, heal yourself!” means that the healer or benefactor (in this case Jesus) should take care of his own and does not imply that Jesus himself has some deficiency or fault that needs correcting.⁵

3. This helps us make more sense of what comes next, and what we can learn from the whole passage.

- a) The locals want Jesus to favour them, to take care of them because they are the group he belongs to.

²⁴ But I tell you the truth, no prophet is accepted in his own hometown.

- b) Jesus points out that far from his being a local making him acceptable, and able to fit in and help, the reality is that prophets are normally rejected by their own people
- c) As Evans explains;

The people of Nazareth expect Jesus to do the same things for them that he has done for the people of Capernaum. If Jesus’ pronouncement that the Isaiah passage was truly fulfilled, then all could expect Jesus to do wonderful things for them. In v. 24, however, Jesus disappoints this expectation by stating that no prophet is accepted in his home town.

^{5 5} Evans, C. A. (1990). *Luke* (p. 71). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books

The irony is that the word “accepted” (or “acceptable”) in this verse is the same word found in v. 19 above. The prophet who is to announce the “acceptable” year of the Lord is himself not “acceptable” to his own people (cf. John 1:10–11).

Underlying this expression is the long tradition of the rejected, persecuted, and martyred prophets of Israel. Those prophets who spoke the word of God often found themselves out of favor or “unacceptable” to the ruling political and religious establishments of their times...

Instead of proclaiming what the authorities wanted to hear, the prophets of old spoke what God wanted said. So it is in the case of Jesus in the Nazareth synagogue. The people hear that the messianic era is at hand, and in this they rejoice; but they hear that it will not entail what they expect, and with this they become angry.⁶

4. Prophet

- a) A prophet was also called a “seer”, one who sees things others don’t

(1) To prophesy basically means inspired speaking

5. Jesus was “the Prophet” as well as Messiah

- a) Because he was the Son, the Word in human form, he was able to speak what he saw, to reveal the mind, the way and the truth of God and his kingdom

(1) Jesus was not going to play favourites, or be controlled by those he grew up with

(2) He came to teach, heal and save people from all places without fear or favour, without discrimination or prejudice

6. Andrew Prior points out how a prophet is one who sees and speaks what the good news really is, that a prophet is one;

... Who sees that good news to the poor, release to the captives, and recovery of sight, is about solidarity and stepping down from privilege; that it is the removal of demarcation by difference rather than reinforcing difference to maintain privilege.

⁶ Evans

a) Jesus clearly came to break down such barriers and the prejudices and selfishness and exclusivity that erects and maintains them

7. As Jesus says, prophets were invariably rejected by their own people

a) Because they almost always brought messages that warned and corrected their people about their wrong expectations of God and their wrong behaviours towards him and others

b) In most cases they wanted God to think and act like they did, and do what they wanted

B. JESUS WAS REJECTED LIKE OTHER PROPHETS

1. Jesus didn't come as a "leader" in the worldly sense, or in the sense expected by his own people

a) He has just shown his rejection of the temptation to be that kind of leader in the temptations in the wilderness

b) Instead Jesus came as a prophet, as The Suffering Servant, to reveal God as a God of love, mercy and grace, who loves and heals and includes all people as his people

(1) And he would die to save and heal all people, rather than use his power and position to force them to follow and obey him

2. It is easy to pick on the people back then

a) But there is a lesson for all of us today as well

b) God isn't always what we expect

c) We need to be humble and listening to the truth God is communicating to us about who he is, and his very different ways of bringing peace and setting things right

d) We need to be careful of our reactions when things aren't the way we expect or want them to be

C. LUKE 4:25-30

1. Jesus then really raised their hackles by giving examples of how the prophets before had also done miracles and helped the Gentile foreigners, rather than them

²⁵ "Certainly there were many needy widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the heavens were closed for three and a half years, and a severe famine devastated the

land. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a foreigner—a widow of Zarephath in the land of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, but the only one healed was Naaman, a Syrian.”

²⁸ When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious.

2. William Loader

...after initial positive responses, the crowds turned against Jesus because he went outside of the respected in Israel and reached out to the sinners, to [tax]collectors and outcasts (the parable of the great feast represents it in allegorical form: 14:16-24). Luke is arguing that such outreach incited anger and hatred and led to Jesus’ execution, prefigured here by the attempt to stone him (i.e. the common method of throwing people over a precipice and then dropping large rocks on them). In Acts we find a similar pattern. An initially positive response among the Jews leads to anger and hatred when the mission opens up to the Gentiles. Luke is using the opening scene of Jesus’ ministry as the key to all that follows in both books, the Gospel and Acts.⁷

3. Brian MacLaren

In his very first public sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:18-27), Jesus ... “flips the meaning” of Isaiah (61:1-2) by dropping the phrase “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Lest anyone miss the “de-hostilization” and “de-exclusivization” of his omission, he then refers to the story of the prophet Elijah who was directed by God to help a Sidonian woman — an outsider of another religion. And then he adds the story of the prophet Elisha helping a Syrian man — another outsider of another religion.

You can imagine the panic in the minds of Jesus’ neighbors as they process what their homegrown prophet is saying: *What? Is Jesus suggesting that God loves “those people — Sidonians and Syrians” — just as much as “us?” Is this “good news to the poor” universal, for all people, rather than exclusive to members of our religion only? Who does he think he is to betray our elite, exclusive identity like this? This is heresy! Blasphemy! Treason!*

That day in Nazareth ...he went right to the heart of us-them oppositional identity. No one should be surprised at the response: hostility. The people who spoke well of him a few moments before (Luke 4:22) now want to kill

⁷⁷ William Loader, <http://wwwstaff.murdoch.edu.au/~loader/LkEpiphany4.htm>

him (4:28-29). (This, no doubt, illuminates the real meaning of Jesus' words, "I have come not to bring peace, but a sword.")⁸

²⁸ When they heard this, the people in the synagogue were furious. ²⁹ Jumping up, they mobbed him and forced him to the edge of the hill on which the town was built. They intended to push him over the cliff, ³⁰ but he passed right through the crowd and went on his way.

4. Fred Kane

Luke doesn't claim this was a miracle.

He reports it in very matter-of-fact language. "Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way." What happened?

You know the old line, "Blind with rage"? Did their own anger affect their vision? Did they get so mad they lost sight of Jesus? Were they so angry they lost sight of the treasure in their midst? "Jesus passed through the midst of them and went on his way." The greatest opportunity possible had just come to them, and they got so mad they lost sight of it. You see why I think it is such a sad line.

We live in a world of hate and fear. We are living in a world where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and sure, some people may be feeling like slaves. We live in a world of terrorists, just like they did, only our terrorists are much more dangerous.

...And I'm afraid that in this world of fear and anger, it's too easy to lose sight of Jesus. The fellow who said, turn the other cheek, carry the other guy's coat, take the log out of your own eye. The fellow who said God sends rain on good people and bad. The fellow who points out that God loves foreigners.

And I'm really, really scared, that one of these days, Jesus will pass through our midst and go on his own way.⁹

5. Craig Evans adds;

What makes all of this preaching so "unacceptable" is that the people of Jesus' time expected Messiah to come and destroy Israel's enemies, not minister to them. With respect to messianic expectation the Jewish people of the first century held, by and large, to two basic beliefs:

⁸ Brian MacLaren, *Why Did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Mohammed Cross the Road?*, p. 202-203

⁹ Kane

(1) Every generation believed that the coming of Messiah was very near and that he would probably come in their own time; and

(2) all believed that when Messiah would come he would vanquish the Gentiles (and perhaps the corrupt of Israel) and restore and bless Israel.

Isaiah 61:1–2 was a passage that was felt to witness to this second belief. It was believed that the blessings described in this OT passage were reserved for Israel alone, while the “day of vengeance” (that part of the quotation omitted by Jesus) was reserved for Israel’s enemies.

When Jesus announced that Isa. 61:1–2 was fulfilled **today**, he fulfilled the expectations of the first commonly held belief.

However, when he announced that **no prophet is accepted** and then cited the examples of **Elijah** and **Elisha**, he flatly contradicted the second belief. This contradiction led to their outrage and the attempt to kill Jesus by throwing **him down the cliff**.¹⁰

III. LESSONS

A. LET’S REMEMBER THAT THIS IS VERY EARLY IN JESUS’ MINISTRY

1. Luke is making sure that his readers, who were mostly Gentile, understood who Jesus was from the beginning
 - a) Not only his message but his mission, and how that mission was to free people from all types of oppression, particularly from that caused by prejudice and *us versus them* exclusivism and judgmentalism
 - b) God in Christ, through the Spirit created all things and all people

B. WE AS HUMAN BEINGS SINCE THE BEGINNING HAVE ALL TURNED AGAINST GOD AND AGAINST THOSE WHO AREN’T PART OF OUR IN GROUP

1. It is a great temptation to do as the religious people did in Jesus’ time, and before and after

¹⁰ Evans, C. A. (1990). *Luke* (p. 72). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

- a) To endeavour to reinforce our identity as God's people by pointing the finger at others, and claiming we have God on our side and expecting him to punish those who don't conform to our views

C. JINGOISM

- 1. We see this way too much in Australian politics, and to an alarming degree amongst right wing politicians in the US at the moment

- 2. It used to be called Jingoism

- a) The dictionary definition is;

the feelings and beliefs of people who think that their country is always right and who are in favor of aggressive acts against other countries¹¹

- b) Jingoistic attitudes paint outsiders, people of other religions, races and cultures as bad, as the enemy plotting against us
- c) In the US they pick on Mexican immigrants, African Americans, and Moslems in particular

- 3. But this isn't just the cause of international tensions and hostilities, it applies in defined groups of peoples, religious and secular.

- a) As individuals we are also too often caught up in such Jingoistic, cliquish, selfish behaviours

(1) Like the people in Nazareth we like feel we have God on our side, fighting against those we disapprove of

- 4. But as we see in our passage, we will end up frustrated and find that Jesus is not with us in such attitudes

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¹¹ *Jingoism*, Merriam-Webster American Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jingoism>

5. Religious people too often want salvation and righteousness their way, and tend to vociferously oppose those who don't fit in with their expectations, or oppose who and what they oppose

a) We see way too much of this approach in the US, with conservative Christians being one of the main encouragers of such attitudes among politicians

D. JESUS' EXAMPLE

1. Rather than satisfying the expectations and demands of the religious people of his day, and leading the people to freedom by opposing their enemies with raw power and might, Jesus led and brought freedom by suffering and self-sacrifice

a) He suffered alongside the poor, the rejected and maligned, the sick and the despised

b) He shared in the pain and suffering of all those who have been persecuted and martyred by evil forces and governmental oppression

c) He submitted to the injustice and betrayal that came from his own people because he didn't conform to their mindset and religious standards

2. He died at the hands of those religious leaders and their followers who wanted him to be their kind of Messiah

a) But he passed through their midst and was resurrected on the other side as the only true Messiah

3. Through this loving, gracious act of humble self-sacrifice, and the rescuing, resurrecting power of God, Jesus one the victory over sin and death, rebellion and self-righteousness, hatred, judgmentalism, exclusivism and oppression

4. He is the only Messiah and Saviour we have

a) He is the only one who can rescue us and the rest of mankind, good and bad

b) And his victory came not through human might or power, but through the power of God's sacrificial love

5. Jesus brings the *acceptable day of the Lord*, God's kingdom of peace and unity, true belonging and righteousness
6. And that *acceptable day* comes, not from human earthly power and religious piety, belligerence, jingoism and militarism
 - a) But through God's gracious loving mercy and forgiveness, which are the essence of true power and freedom
 - b) As we will remember at Easter, it was through his own crucified and resurrected body he unites Jew and Gentile, slave and free, rich and poor, the oppressed and the oppressor, the righteous and the unrighteous

CONCLUSION:

E. WE ARE NOW IN THE TIME OF LENT

1. A time of preparation, of self-examination before Easter
2. A time to look deeply into our hearts and minds, to examine motives, our emotions, and our relationships
3. A time to remember the approach Jesus took to injustice and evil, to wrong doing and betrayal
4. The way he defeated sin and evil by ultimate act of loving self-sacrifice, not raising his voice or raising a finger in anger or self-justified aggression or hatred
5. That is the type of Messiah he was, and remains
6. And he wants us to deal with the world around us in just the same way, as partners in his ongoing mission of ushering in the acceptable day of the Lord, and bringing true peace and freedom--God's way

F. FRED NIEDNER, SUMMARISES WHAT WE HAVE BEEN LEARNING FROM LUKE 4

What is your program, Jesus? We sit in your congregation today. Tell us! Jesus stands to read, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor ... to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

He ends in the middle of a verse without reading, “and the day of vengeance of our God.” Nor does Jesus read more of Isaiah’s oracle concerning comfort for mourners and cloaking the faint of spirit with praise, perhaps because further on Isaiah would repeat the claim that Israel shall have for itself the wealth of the nations, while all those others end up with nothing but God’s vengeance heaped upon them.

Such was — and is — the conventional messianic dream of oppressed people. When we take over, we will be on top. The creeps who have oppressed us will be on the first track out.

Jesus wants no part of that. How, then, would he bring good news to the poor or freedom to the oppressed? He would do it, Luke shows, through persistent befriending of the poor, the outcasts, the little people of his day, including those who seemed his enemies. He listened to them and ate with them. Some he healed of maladies that diminished their lives. He simply kept on like that until he fell victim to the rich and the powerful.

Even then he responded not with vengeance, threats or self-interest. Rather, he went calmly toward death, stopping along the way to heal a slave’s ear, to comfort the women who wept for him, to ask forgiveness for his murderers and to encourage his fellow condemned. There we see Jesus’ messianic mission, the epiphany of God’s glory in action.¹²

G. PRAYER

¹² Fred Niedner, in *The Christian Century*, “Living by the Word” (Jan. 3, 2001 <http://girardianlectionary.net/reflections/year-c/epiphany3c/>)