

Jesus is the Saviour of the World

Luke 4:14-30

*Brother, Sister, let me serve you,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace
To let you be my servant, too.*

It is startling to find this story of **rejection** at the beginning of Luke's description of Jesus' ministry, **immediately after** he tells us of Jesus' baptism and temptation. The other Gospel writers tell us this only took place after a period of ministry in Judea and after quite a time in Galilee. Is Luke telling us that **we too** may face rejection, even hatred and death, if we follow Jesus faithfully? I believe he is, but Luke is also concerned that we learn **more about Jesus** through this incident.

Luke himself tells us this wasn't at the very beginning. In the power of the Spirit Jesus had taught in other synagogues in Galilee and all had praised him. News about him had spread all around, and now he'd come to Nazareth, where Jesus had grown up. On the Sabbath he'd gone, as he always did, to the local synagogue, but this was **the one he'd attended as boy and man for years**.

As **he stood up** to indicate he was willing to read God's word, he was handed the scroll of Isaiah and he found the place he was to read from. It may have been that day's set passage, or his own choice – we don't know. He read those verses from Isaiah 61 and then **sat down**, as the custom was, in the seat assigned for preachers. Everyone's eyes were fastened on him and he began by saying, '**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your own hearing**'.

All Isaiah's words are wonderful – read them yourself, especially from chapter 40 onwards! They describe **what God promised to do**. You will find that God is speaking to his people – or God is speaking to one of them in particular, whom he calls **his Servant**. Then in chapter 61 we hear this Servant himself speak, '*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor..*' Jesus does more than quote these words – he is clearly saying **he himself is this Servant of the Lord**. He doesn't exactly spell it out that he is the long-expected Messiah, but he infers it!

Whatever Jesus went on to say, his hearers that day were astonished at his words. Before we think about their next thoughts – let's think a little about **the words Jesus read**. Now we know that Jesus **did** restore **physical** sight to the blind, and he **did** tell good news to the poor. But **'this year of God's special favour'** meant something deeper and more wonderful. More than the Law prescribed for every 7th or 50th year in the life of Israel. Isaiah was describing a **spiritual renewal**, not unlike that we heard about in Nehemiah's time.

*Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near.
Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.
Let him turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon. (55:6)*

*Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice...
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?
Is it not to share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter –
when you see the naked, to clothe him
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?
Then your light will break forth like the dawn,
and your healing will quickly appear;
then your righteousness will go before you,
and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.
Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;
you will cry for help and he will say, Here am I. (58:6-9)*

I have quoted some more of Isaiah's words and I don't know if Jesus spoke like that – but Luke tells us there were other thoughts in the minds of his hearers. Perhaps they nudged each other and said: **Wasn't he our carpenter? Don't we know his family?**

Some might have said this with a personal pride – but others with contempt and unbelief at Jesus' claim: **Who does he think he is?!**

Isn't this Joseph's son? No, no, a million times no! (As one writer put it.) As the voice at his baptism declared, as the devil himself admitted at his temptation, **This is the Son of God!!**

Their thoughts are confined to their own town. They'd heard rumours of what he'd done 30 km away in Capernaum, but what really matters to them is that he should perform miracles **here** in Nazareth!

But Jesus makes it clear – his message of grace is not just for Nazareth, not just for Galilee, not just for Israel even – but for the whole of humanity. **He is the Saviour of the World**. God spoke to his Servant, *It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob .. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth. (Isa 49:6)*

'Prophets never get accepted in their own country'. Thus it had been in Israel years before – but in his love and grace, God had brought salvation and blessing to a foreign widow, and salvation and healing to a foreign general. §

The implication was obvious. God could still do the same right now – if God's people, Israel, refuse to hear and accept God's salvation – blessing would come to the Gentiles instead!

But the people of Nazareth were blind, imprisoned in their unbelief and scorn for non-Jews. *Was he telling us that we're not as deserving as the heathen? Then away with him! He's a blasphemer and deserves to die!* They tried to, but Jesus' time had not yet come. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, suffered the same response, when he stood on the steps from the Temple up into the Roman fort and was allowed to address the mob below! (Acts 22:21-22) As soon as he said that God had told him, *Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles*, they shouted, **He's not fit to live!**

§ See end

How does this story challenge us? 1. We also can be too proud to turn to the Saviour from our sins and seek God's pardon. Some find they cannot stomach the truth that we deserve hell, and can in no way to merit heaven. They remain **lost, blind and captive**.

We too can be proud and think ourselves better than others. Such pride can cause divisions even between Christians.

2. If we recognise we are **utterly undeserving** of God's mercy – that we are saved by grace alone, and made members of God's people, his sons and daughters, then **we** must fall at our Saviour's feet in wonder, love and praise! And serve him wholeheartedly!

3. When we recognise that this is true for **everyone of us** in this room – who've surrendered to Jesus as Saviour and Lord – then we are not just God's sons and daughters – **we are each other's brothers and sisters** and must love one another with a special love! And this mustn't remain just theory – we must find ways to make it true in reality. Have **all** barriers been broken down? Remember Paul's words:

For you are all children of God, through faith, in the Messiah, Jesus. ... There is no longer Jew or Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no 'male and female'; you are all one in the Messiah, Jesus. (Gal 3:26-28)

*These are the clothes you must put on, then, since God has chosen you, made you holy, and lavished his love upon you. You must be tender-hearted, kind, humble, meek, and ready to put up with anything. You must bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against someone else, you must forgive each other. Just as the Master forgave you, **you must do the same**. On top of all this you must put on **love**, which ties everything together and makes it complete. (Col 3:11-14)*

Our unity and love are a powerful witness to the world of the transforming grace of God!

§ *I added the following in the course of preaching:*

The widow of Zarephath near Sidon (1 Kings 17:7-16) was approached by Elijah for a drink. She told him she was gathering sticks to bake a last meal for herself and her son, before they died, having exhausted all food in the famine. He said, Do that, but give it to me, and then bake for yourselves – because the Lord God of Israel has said your flour and oil will never run out until He again send rain.

The general Naaman (2 Kings 5:1-19) commanded the Syrian army. A valiant soldier, he nevertheless had leprosy. He had been told about the prophet Elisha in Samaria – so he came with his chariots and horses to Elisha's door – who only sent him a message to wash seven times in the river Jordan, and God would heal him! Naaman was furious... but his servants said, 'If the prophet told you to do some great thing, wouldn't you have done it?' So he went – and his flesh became like that of a young boy. Naaman was overjoyed that he had believed.

God loves us, everyone, but knows we all need to humble ourselves and trust in Him and His word. He tests our faith in Him and may not heal or bless us in some special way until we've surrendered to Him and been willing to obey Him.

The implication for Jesus' hearers