

## INTRODUCTION

What you say can sometimes land you in trouble. There is a funny story about a man who purchased a horse that formerly belonged to a preacher. The preacher told the new buyer the horse only responded to "religious commands." To make the horse go, the command, "Praise the Lord," had to be given. To stop the horse, "Hallelujah!" was the instruction. The purchaser was skeptical so he got on the horse and said, "Giddyup!" But the horse didn't move. The preacher said, "I told you, he only goes when you say 'praise the Lord' and he only stops when you say 'hallelujah.'" So the man buying the horse said, "Praise the Lord" and the horse took off at a full gallop. The problem was that the horse was headed for a cliff. "Whoa!" the man shouted, but the horse kept running. He had forgotten the word to make the horse stop. But just in the nick of time he hollered, "Hallelujah!" The horse screeched to a stop at the edge of the cliff. At which time the scared rider wiped his brow and said, "Praise the Lord!"

It is true that what you say can get you into trouble. Today we are going to see that what the Lord Jesus said in his home synagogue also almost got him thrown over a cliff. But what Jesus said was not an accident. He intended to say what He said. Let's read about it in Luke 4:14-30.

Luke 4:14-30. Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't that Joseph's son?" they asked. Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" I tell you the truth," He continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 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. And 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." All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Most of you have heard me refer to my hometown Florala in South Alabama. I grew up there and was saved at First Baptist Church. Every summer they have a homecoming service, and in 1982, they invited me back to preach. It was a great joy for me to return to the place where I grew up going to Sunday School and church. The building didn't seem to be nearly as large as I

remembered! After church, we had an old-fashioned covered dish dinner served down in the fellowship hall. As I stood around with my paper plate bending from the load of fried chicken and fresh garden vegetables, at least a dozen of my former Sunday School and Training Union teachers came up to speak to me. They all basically said the same thing, “you were one of the most rambunctious children I ever had in my class.” My old RA teacher even reminded me of the time I broke Paul Hutchinson’s jaw during an RA softball game as we argued over whether a ball was foul or fair. They all were pretty amazed I turned out to be a preacher!

In this text, we see Jesus doing the same thing. He has returned to His “home synagogue” to preach. I’m sure many of the folks remembered Him and looked forward to hearing what He had to say. Let’s go back in our minds to that place and time almost 2,000 years ago. Let’s take a seat in the back of the synagogue and see what transpired at homecoming at Jesus’ church.

First, let’s notice

### **I. THE SETTING: HOMETOWN BOY RETURNS! (14-17)**

According to Josephus, Nazareth was a busy city of almost 20,000 during this time. It had the rough and tough character of a military town due to its placement at the crossroads of two important highways, both of which were used by the ubiquitous Roman army. Jerusalem was the “holy city,” but Nazareth was anything but holy, because of the all the Gentiles found there.

After the baptism and temptation of Jesus, He had been traveling around the other areas of Galilee preaching and even performing miracles. Most of the folks in Nazareth had already heard the story of how Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding feast 10 miles down the road in Cana. There were also scattered reports of healing. This Jesus of Nazareth had become a hot topic of conversation all over the region. And now, on this Sabbath, there was a whisper among the crowd as they assembled at the synagogue. “Look, there he is. Jesus is here today.”

As part of the worship, a man in congregation would be asked to read from the Torah (the law), then make remarks. After this, a man would read from the Prophets and make remarks. Jesus was handed the scroll of Isaiah. He carefully unrolled it from back to front until He found the passage to read. Before we leave this setting there is something important I want you to note:

#### **Note: It was the weekly custom of Jesus to gather with others to worship God**

It was part of the regular weekly custom of Jesus to worship every Sabbath in a synagogue. Now you can be certain there were many things going on the Synagogue Jesus didn’t agree with. Some things probably grated on His sense of spiritual perfection. Yet He still went, every Sabbath! The Synagogue was far from perfect, yet Jesus didn’t excuse Himself from worshipping with God’s people on God’s day. If there was ever anyone who really didn’t need to go to church, it was Jesus. After all, He was God in the flesh. He communed with His heavenly Father on a continual basis. But when the Sabbath rolled around, where was He? In the local synagogue.

Do you see the lesson? If the Son of God took time every week to gather with others to worship we should as well. Even if you aren’t 100% pleased with what goes on in your church, you

should never get out of the good habit of worshiping with God’s people. Some people think you can worship God out on the lake or on the golf course. You *can* worship God anywhere but the primary reason a person goes to the golf course on Sunday morning is *not* to worship, even though they may utter the Lord’s name a few times! The main reason a person goes to the lake on Sunday morning is not to worship. Their main interest is fishing, or skiing, or swimming. But when you come to church, the main reason you are here is to worship God. You will have fun, fellowship, and friendship but the main reason you come is to meet God in worship. Don’t miss this important lesson from Jesus.

Second, let’s notice

## **II. THE TEXT: ISAIAH 61 (18-19)**

The text that Jesus chose to read was found in Isaiah 61. Of course, in that time the Old Testament wasn’t divided into chapters and verses, so He had to unroll much of the scroll to find the exact place where these words were written. Jesus used these words to explain His mission. By studying this, we can gain a clearer understanding of the reason Jesus came to planet earth.

We have read several times that Jesus was filled with the Spirit, or led by the Spirit, again Luke tells us in verse 14 that Jesus returned to Galilee “in the power of the Spirit.” Jesus begins reading from Isaiah and proclaims the Messiah will be One upon whom the Spirit of God rests. Then we see what we could call a “job description” of the Messiah.

Jesus came to proclaim this Good News to the weak: The word “poor” literally means “someone who is unable to care for himself.” A better rendering would be the word “needy” or “weak.” Throughout His ministry Jesus stressed that like a Great Physician, He didn’t come for the “well” but for the “sick.” The point is we are *all* sick, some just don’t realize it. He came to announce good news to the “weak,” that’s the general task. Then we see four specific areas in which He would help needy people:

### **1. Freedom for those in bondage!**

During this time in history, there were some who were actual slaves, but Jesus is also speaking of another kind of bondage. 2 Timothy 2:26 says Satan has “captured many people to do his will.” Jesus came to set people free from all kinds of bondage. Many people in Israel expected the Messiah to raise an army and rebel against the Roman Empire and once again make Israel a free, independent nation. Jesus spoke about another kind of liberty and freedom. In John 8:32 Jesus said, (He said if you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples) “Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

Some of you who are reading this are in bondage to certain sins and attitudes. You may be a slave to your appetites. We can’t see the chains but you are entrapped by some terrible addiction from which it seems you can’t escape. Jesus has the key, in fact, He *is* the key to set you free today. Will you accept the freedom that He provides?

### **2. Sight for the blind!**

Jesus actually healed many people who were physically blind but He didn't heal every blind person in Israel. He had the power to do that, but He also has a greater power: to deliver people from spiritual blindness. Until a person comes to know Jesus in a personal way, they are blind. In II Corinthians 4:4 we read: "The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God."

Once I was speaking with a college professor who was a skeptic. He was a nice guy and could talk easily about his lack of belief. He considered the Bible to be only a collection of stories. He once said to me, "I just can't see what you and other Christians say that you see in Jesus and the Bible." I said to him, "You are exactly right. The Bible itself says that you can't see it." He said, "What?" I showed him this verse, and he asked me, "So you think I'm blind?" I said, "I'm not saying you are blind, the Bible says you are blind." I don't know if he ever became a believer but this verse really made him think. You see, an unbeliever says, "I'll believe it when I see it." Bible faith says, "I'll see it when I believe it." See the difference? Jesus came to open the blinded eyes and blinded minds of unbelievers. He is still doing that today.

### **3. Restoration for the Broken!**

Look at the last word in verse 18. The word "oppressed" literally means to be "bruised or broken." It is the Greek Word *thrauo* meaning "to be broken in pieces." It was a word that would have been used for a piece of pottery that had been shattered. Jesus came to repair shattered lives. He came to restore broken hearts. The full text of Isaiah 61 says, "to heal the broken hearted."

In Bible times a potter often repaired broken vessels by adding a natural adhesive to the parts. To me it is a beautiful picture to see Jesus repairing broken hearts the same way. He can take the pieces of your broken heart and use the glue of His unconditional love to restore it. The Bible says about the Lord in Psalm 147:3 "He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds." Have you ever suffered from a broken heart? Some of you may be hurting from a broken heart right at this very moment. I'm amazed at the skill of the vascular surgeons in Tyler but you can't diagnose a broken heart with an arteriogram and there is no cardiac surgery that can mend it.

Maybe you have been rejected, a mate left you for another person. Maybe you have suffered discouragement and disappointment. Perhaps your heart is broken because you know you have failed the Lord. There are a million experiences out there that can break your heart. Today Jesus stands ready to do what He said He came to do: Heal your broken heart. In order for him to do that, you must hand Him all the pieces. He can't fix it if you hold back and hang onto some of the broken pieces.

I remember a fellow athlete I played football with in high school. He broke his arm and it wasn't set properly. Consequently, he had trouble and pain for many years. Later in life, he went back for corrective surgery. In essence, they had to break it again and fix it right. Some of you today suffered from a broken heart many years ago and you didn't have it properly repaired. You are still hurting, even though it's been years since it happened. The Great Physician is in today and His specialty is fixing broken hearts—won't you let Him?

#### **4. This is the age of God's Grace!**

In verse 19, Jesus said He has come to "announce the year of God's favor." Now that doesn't mean that for the next 365 days God would offer favor and mercy. The word "year" means a specific time period that has a beginning and an ending. He is speaking of the dawning of the age of Grace as opposed to the Old Testament Age of the Law. Actually, we are currently living in this age of grace. It began with Jesus' first coming and it will conclude with His second coming.

It is interesting to note as Jesus is reading Isaiah 61, He abruptly stops in the middle of a sentence. If you took the time to read Isaiah 61 you'll see the phrase that follows the one about the "year of God's favor" says, "and the day of vengeance of our God." Why didn't Jesus finish the sentence? Because there is a mystery about His coming, namely, that it is a two-act drama. The Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, saw the drama as a whole and didn't separate the two acts by centuries. They anticipated salvation and judgment together. The year of liberation and the day of vengeance were all one. Jesus stopped in mid-sentence because He was announcing the purpose of His first coming. He came the first time to preach the good news of grace. He came to save: That's act one. But at His second coming, He will arrive as the Judge who will execute vengeance on sinners: That's act two. He didn't read that next phrase because He knew something Isaiah didn't. He understood that at least two thousand years would occur between His first coming and His second coming. Right now, we are living in this Age of Grace. God extends the offer of salvation. It is a free gift, for now.

#### **Note: The Mission of Jesus should also be the mission of the Body of Christ**

During this age of Grace, we should be doing the same thing that Jesus did. His message of good news should be our message. Sometimes churches forget man's greatest need is spiritual. It is very important for us to help the poor with money, assist the blind with medicine and feed the hungry with food. It is important to pay attention to the physical and material needs of people. But it is much more important for us to minister to those who are spiritually blind and spiritually bound. The church is the *only* representative Jesus left on earth. This is where you ought to be able to come to find healing for your broken heart.

John Piper said, "Let it be declared unashamedly and reasonably that the greatest and most loving thing we can do for anyone is release them from the captivity of sin, heal them from the blindness of unbelief and set them at liberty from the oppression of Satan. Efforts at social improvement that neglect this great spiritual goal will be looked back on by poor people in hell as a horrible form of ecclesiastical malpractice."

So that's the text Jesus used for His homecoming sermon. Then He handed the scroll back to the Synagogue attendant and sat down. In the synagogue, the reader of the scripture always stood to read out of reverence to God's Word but then he would sit down for his discourse. So next we are going to look at

### **III. THE MESSAGE: THREE POINTS (20-27)**

When you look at this “sermon” of Jesus, you will see He makes three points and even uses some Old Testament illustrations to support them. Notice His three points:

### **1. “I am the Messiah.”**

He had the boldness to say this scripture from Isaiah 61 was fulfilled today in their midst. That was an audacious claim for Joseph and Mary’s boy! The listeners didn’t get to upset by what He said; instead they were pleased by His “gracious words.” Can’t you hear some of them saying, “Amen!” while others whispered to each other, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” The reason they didn’t get too upset is because there was a tremendous sense of expectation for the Messiah to reveal Himself and the Jews in Nazareth thought the main role of the Messiah would be to deliver the Jews. So rather than being skeptical at this point, they were hopeful. But Jesus hadn’t started preaching yet. He was just making an observation about Himself. He could have continued talking about Himself and they would have continued to say “amen.” Preaching that only uses non-offensive generalizations is safe preaching. But preaching becomes dangerous when the preacher has the guts to use this three-letter word: “Y-O-U.”

As long as a preacher talks about Himself or others who aren’t present, his audience is happy. That’s what a lot of preaching is today, a mild mannered man standing up in front of mild mannered people suggesting they become more mild mannered. Leonard Ravenhill used to lament what he called “preacherettes preaching sermonettes to Christianettes who smoke cigarettes.” Jesus is about to shock them.

### **2. “But you won’t accept me because I won’t let you use me.”**

In verse 23 Jesus uses the Y word, “You will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’” The point of this statement is “You are sick and I’m going to tell you that you are spiritually sick but you aren’t going to believe me and you aren’t going to like it.” He knew they just wanted Him to do a few heavenly magic tricks like they had heard He had done down in Capernaum. He was basically saying, “I’m not going to do it. You are sick people and I’m not going to let you use me as your puppet, even if I am from your town.”

Suddenly there are no more “amens!” His words were met with shocked, stony silence. Steam was probably rising from collars of some of the proud men there. But Jesus wasn’t finished yet, he continued His message with a point that really made them mad.

### **3. “Just because you are hometown Jews, don’t expect any special favors from God.”**

Jesus observed this spiritual principle: No prophet is accepted in his hometown. The little ladies who used to keep Him in the synagogue nursery were probably grinding their teeth now. The men who taught His Sunday School class may have been regretting they even let Him speak. He admitted He expected to be rejected by them, because God didn’t restrict His grace and mercy to the Jews only.

Jesus supports this point by sharing two Old Testament illustrations that made His audience livid with anger. First, He reminded them that when Elijah was around, God completely bypassed the

thousands of widows in Israel and showed favor to a Gentile widow in Sidon. God supernaturally extended her supply of grain and oil until the famine passed. God didn’t do that for a single Jewish widow. What’s the point? If the Jews in Nazareth thought God owed them some special favors, think again. God often shows mercy and grace to those who seem the least qualified.

You see, the Jews *hated* the Gentiles. A few years before Jesus, one famous Jewish rabbi stated, “God created Gentiles just to be the fuel for hell.” The Jews in Nazareth were terribly offended Jesus would even mention God’s mercy and grace to the hateful Gentiles!

His second illustration just drove this sharp point deeper into their anger. He reminded them that when Elisha was God’s prophet, instead of choosing to heal some Israelite who had leprosy, God chose instead to heal a pagan Syrian. And not just any Gentile, but the commander of the Syrian army who had been killing Jews! The prophet told Naaman to dip himself seven times in the Jordan River. At first, Naaman was indignant. After all, he had larger and more beautiful rivers in Damascus. But finally Naaman agreed to believe God’s Word. He dipped six times, still no change. Then on the seventh time, he came up clean. The Bible even says his skin was as soft as that of a newborn baby. By the way, if he had stopped at the sixth dip, Naaman would have died of leprosy. Some of you have almost obeyed God, too but you haven’t fully obeyed Him. You have done about 6/7 of what God has commanded you—and stopped. And you wonder why there is still no change in your life? Learn the lesson from Naaman.

It doesn’t make any sense but God seldom conforms to our sense of what’s right or fair. In fact, there is something we need to learn about this message today:

**Note: God has the right to show His mercy to whomever He chooses—even those that we think don’t qualify**

Sometimes we hear about some drug-addicted rock star who finds Jesus. Our first response is skepticism, sure! Or we learn of some wicked prostitute who accepts Christ. We think, “Well that’s okay, just as long as she doesn’t come to my church.” Here is some stinking, homeless person who accepts God’s free gift of salvation. We think, “Well, if he does come here, watch your purse.” Where did we ever get the idea that God can only save nice, clean, prosperous, respectable folks?

Oh, you’d never admit it out loud. But when someone comes into your class or our church, you often accept them because they are “my kind of people.” But you let someone who isn’t “your kind of people” visit your class or come to your church and you look at them and think, “Who let them in here?” God forbid we should ever ignore *any* person who needs Jesus. As the church, the Body of Christ, we must reach out and minister to the hurting, the stinking, the strange, the addict, the drunkard, the pervert, the abuser, the thief, and the liar. Why? Because you look at the very worst example of human misery you can find and say, “There, but for the grace of God, that’s me.” You ought to open your arms to anyone who receives God’s grace. If you don’t, you are guilty of the same spiritual pride that infected the people in the synagogue in Nazareth.

Well, after Jesus preached His brief message, let’s notice

#### IV. THE INVITATION: MANY COME FORWARD! (28-30)

Billy Graham used to say, “In just a moment I’m going to give the invitation. Hundreds are going to come forward in this holy moment.” Before Jesus could even finish His sermon and give the invitation, the people came forward all right but they didn’t come to join the synagogue or to pray or to tell Jesus, “I really enjoyed the sermon today.” Instead, these people were so infuriated they rushed forward and it says they “drove him” out of the synagogue and even out of the town. The word “drove” is a picture of a man driving a herd of oxen, yelling and whipping them. This Jewish synagogue turned into an angry mob as they yelled, spit, screamed, and pummeled Jesus with their fists. They didn’t like the message, so they decided to kill the messenger. Now Nazareth is built on a tall ledge. Today, a new Radisson Hotel stands right on the precipice at the top of this ledge. It is clear this was where the angry mob drove Jesus. According to their law, He was guilty of blasphemy and he deserved to die. They weren’t just trying to scare him or warn him. They intended to kill him. Can’t you see Jesus standing at the edge of this cliff? On one side is an angry mob; on the other side is a sheer drop of over three hundred feet to the jagged rocks below.

Now I just *love* verse 30. It says, “He walked right through the crowd and went on his way.” Whoa! What happened? Did Jesus know Kung Fu and slash and kick His way to safety? Or maybe, He negotiated with them until they changed their minds. Now the Bible doesn’t say exactly what happened but I believe this was a miracle. When an angry mob is trying to kill a guy, He doesn’t just *ordinarily* “walk through the crowd.” I’ve used my sanctified imagination to suggest what might have happened. Perhaps He just stopped time for a moment and while they were all frozen in time, He just walked away. Or perhaps the members of the mob suddenly became blind. Jesus could make blind eyes see and He could make seeing eyes blind. God did that in the Old Testament. Or perhaps Jesus just waved His hand and they suddenly forgot why they were at the cliff in the first place. Do you think God can make a person forget things? Jesus said the Holy Spirit would “bring all things to our remembrance.” If He can do that, I’m sure He can make folks suddenly forget too. (You may be thinking, “So *that’s* what’s wrong with me.”) Just as the waters of the Red Sea parted for Moses to pass through, this angry mob parted for Jesus to pass through. How sad! They wanted a miracle and this would be the only miracle they would see. Could it have been a miracle? Sure. John finishes His gospel account by telling us Jesus did so many more miracles than those in the Bible that all the books in the world couldn’t contain them all. But there is a spiritual reason why they weren’t able to kill Him. Even though Jesus came to die, there was a pre-ordained time and place for Him to die. He would die less than three years later, during the Passover, on the slopes of the same mountain in Jerusalem where Abraham offered Isaac. It wasn’t part of God’s plan for Him to die being thrown off the cliff at Nazareth. However it happened, Jesus was able to slip away, and He headed down to the Sea of Galilee about 18 miles away and based His ministry in Capernaum instead of Nazareth. We can learn something from the response of the people in Jesus’ home synagogue.

**Note: You will either receive or reject Jesus but you can’t ignore Him. The truth of God will make you mad before it sets you free.**



You may not like what you've just heard but that's okay. My job is just to deliver the message. It's your job to decide what you are going to do with it. When you hear the Word of God it will usually make you mad or glad depending on the condition of your heart.

In just a moment we are going to give the invitation. Even though you may want to do so, please don't rush forward and run me out of here to the top of the new building and try to throw me off. It's your job at this point to ask, "Lord, what are you trying to say to me today?"

If you are without Jesus, it's obvious. God is saying, "This is the age of grace. You don't have to be good enough or do good enough to earn salvation, it's a gift." Will you receive Him today? Others of you really are suffering from a broken heart. Jesus is saying, "I know what you are feeling. I understand the pain. I know what it feels like to be rejected. Why, even those people in my home church rejected me. I *know* how you feel." Jesus says, "I care that your heart has been broken. You may think nobody cares but I do." And best of all He says, "I can fix your broken heart, just give me all the pieces."

Some of us nice, religious, long-time Christians had better change our attitudes about the kind of people we start loving and accepting. As part of the body of Christ, we need to be on the same mission that He was on. We need to stand up for and help those who are weak and hurting.

## CONCLUSION

Martin Niemöller was a German pastor who survived the Dachau concentration camp during WWII. He once said, "In Germany they came first for the communists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a communist. Then they came for the Jews, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew. Then they came for the trade-unionists, and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade-unionist. Then they came for the Catholics, and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant. Then they came for me, and by that time no one was left to speak up."

Let's be the voices of Christ, proclaiming the Good News to the poor, weak, blind and oppressed. Let's be the arms of Christ reaching out to those who are hurting.

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### II. THE TEXT: ISAIAH 61 (18-19)

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Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free. *John 8:32*

#### 2. Sight for the blind!

The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. *2 Corinthians 4:4*

#### 3. Restoration for the broken!

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. *Psalms 147:3*

#### 4. This is the age of God’s Grace!

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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes