

“Nazareth – Part 2”

As promised, this is Part 2 – the Gospel today is part 2 of a Gospel story of Jesus' visit to Nazareth. Last week we spent some time examining Jesus' reading of the Scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth on the Sabbath. He read from Isaiah 61 – which explains the mission of God's anointed one – the Christ, the Messiah. Jesus boldly proclaimed after the reading, as He sat down to teach, which is the way that Rabbis taught in the first century. They would read the Scripture standing up but would teach sitting down. Jesus said that *“today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* The people in the congregation were amazed by the manner in which Jesus spoke. I confessed to you last week that I, probably like a whole bunch of other folks thought that the people got angry because Jesus said *“today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”* That is not why they got angry.

Things changed quite drastically as we read in today's Holy Gospel. They started out speaking kindness about *“Joseph's son,”* but then began to question how Joseph's Son, one of their home grown could be the Messiah? Then Jesus expressed His concern for their spiritual health, and He expressed God's desire to help the Gentiles as well as the Jews. This caused their demeanor to make a 180 degree turn around! I am sure the temperature in that room must have skyrocketed! They got angry, I mean absolutely angry. Jesus met their questioning head on by saying: *“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.'”* (Luke 4:23-24) What Jesus was saying here was about equal to John the Baptist's famous saying *“You brood of vipers!”* In essence Jesus was questioning the faith of the people of Nazareth, because all they could think of was the young son of Joseph and Mary, and not of the Man, the Messiah standing in front of them!

As the mood of the room changed, Jesus, sensing their opposition, noted two instances in Scripture in which God's prophets ministered miraculous acts of grace to Gentiles while Israel was in unbelief. We read in the Gospel today about Elijah, you remember Elijah who went to heaven on a fiery chariot from the Jordan River? He ministered to the widow of Zarephath, as the Lord sent him to Zarephath in Sidon. Listen to what happened to Elijah and that widow as recorded in 1 Kings 17:10-14 *“So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked, 'Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?' 'As she was going to get it, he called, 'And bring me, please, a piece of bread.' 'As surely as the LORD your God lives,' she replied, 'I don't have any bread--only a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a jug. I am gathering a few sticks to take home and make a meal for myself and my son, that we may eat it--and die.' 'Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son.' 'For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'”*

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Remember, there had been a 3 year famine and they were at their wits end. Well, the jar of flour and the jug of oil did not run out – BUT – the widow's son died, and Elijah took the young man, carrying him to an upper room and laid the boy out, then he laid on top of him calling out to the Lord. God restored the boy's life. Why would God give miracles for Gentiles? That's what the people of Nazareth were asking – why the Gentiles? Aren't we "the Apple of God's Eye?" Aren't we God's chosen people?

Next Jesus told about the Prophet Elisha and how he was called by God to minister to Naaman the Syrian leper, who was the commander of the enemy army. A Jewish servant girl of Naaman's wife told them that if only he would see Elisha in Samaria then he would be healed. So Naaman got his king's permission and he went to speak with the king of Israel. Naaman brought enough riches in order to "buy" his healing. He arrived at Elisha's house and Elisha didn't go to talk to him himself, but instead he sent a messenger to tell him "*Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed.*" *But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy.* (2Kings 5:10-11) He did not want to do this – but eventually he gave in. "*So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.*" (2 Kings 5:14) He tried to give the riches to Elisha, but it was refused. Here was another Gentile – an enemy of Israel being healed by God.

Jesus' mention of Gentiles rather than Jews having God's blessing caused the people of Nazareth to become enraged. "*All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.*" "*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 down the cliff.*" "*But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*" (Luke 4:28-30) He walked right through – they had no power, no authority.

A pattern began here and would be seen throughout the rest of Jesus' ministry: Jesus went to the Jews; they rejected Him; He told them of Gentile's participation in the kingdom; and so some Jews wanted to kill Him. But Jesus was not killed until the proper time, when He chose to die, willingly. Isn't it amazing that they took Him to the edge of the cliff – but Jesus miraculously walked through the crowd – and was unscathed? It was NOT His time to die. God was totally in control! And what happened then? The Gospel tells us that Jesus returned to Capernaum, where He preached in the synagogue on the Sabbath and people were amazed at the authority in which He spoke. Well of course! God was speaking to them in the flesh! But many of them did not know that until it was time.

The servant-Messiah that Isaiah spoke about in Isaiah 53, 58 and 61 did not come to inflict punishment on the nations. Remember, any time you hear the word "nations" in the Bible it is referring to the Gentiles – the non-Jews. God did not send Jesus, the Messiah to inflict punishment on the Gentiles - but to bring God's love and mercy to them. Do you know what

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mercy means? Mercy means NOT getting what you deserve! God instead gives you a precious gift – He doesn't give you everything you deserve – He gives you salvation. And that will be the fulfilment of a central theme in Israel's very own Holy Scriptures. This message was, and remains, shocking. In Isaiah it says that that the Messiah was sent to be a light to the Gentiles. They read it, they knew it, but they didn't get it! Here Jesus was reminding them of this, and what did it do? It lit their fuse! They wanted to kill Him – this hometown boy. The message was and remains shocking. Jesus' claim to be reaching out with healing to all people was not what most first-century Jews wanted to hear or expected. Jesus coupled it with severe warnings to His own neighbors and countrymen.

- Unless they could see that this was the time for their God to be gracious and filled with mercy.
- Unless they abandoned their dreams of a military victory over their hated national enemies (either the Syrians or the Romans), they would suffer defeat themselves at every single level of their existence – military, political and ideological.

What happened in 66 AD? This was not all that long after Jesus was crucified, died, buried, rose from the dead and ascended to the Father. In 66 AD Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans; the Temple was torn down – the beloved Temple! By 70 AD everything else was gone! That Sabbath in the synagogue of Nazareth, Jesus' challenge and warning to the people that He grew up with – results in a most violent reaction.

When you read, study, and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with others – that very same reaction can happen. How many times do you hear “I don't want to hear about Jesus,” or “I don't want you to talk about Jesus”? “Be my friend, but let's not bring religion into this.” What is the saying? “The two things you don't talk about with friends are religion and politics!” You will find people who are entrenched in other beliefs, and driven more by the culture of the day – and they will have their interests and agendas challenged by the good news of Jesus Christ and His surprising grace. God's promises are not always received with open arms – but we can pray for others to be changed, to be blessed by the Holy Spirit, and for them to welcome Jesus into their hearts. Remember the words of Jesus in Revelation 3:20. He says "*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 him, and he with me.*" That my friends is a far cry from trying to throw Him down the cliff!