

His Rejection Is Our Release

Introduction

The Text

¹⁴ And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. ¹⁵ And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read. ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” ²³ And he said to them, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, “Physician, heal yourself.” What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.” ²⁴ And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. ²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” ²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰ But passing through their midst, he went away. (Luke 4:14–30)

Jesus’ Rejection

- A. As we said last week, Luke puts this scene at the very outset of Jesus’ public ministry because it contains key themes that will be developed throughout the rest of His gospel.
 - 1. Last week, we identified three themes in particular: (1) Jesus’ Identity; (2) Jesus’ Mission; and (3) Jesus’ Rejection. We dealt with the first two last time and shall take up this last theme here this morning: Jesus’ Rejection.
- B. It seems crazy and heartbreaking that we have to discuss Jesus’ Rejection alongside our discussion of His Identity and Mission.
 - 1. There is no greater news in all the world than what Jesus opens up with here in this little synagogue in this little town: “Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (v. 21).

- a. He is the Messiah, the Servant, the Redeemer. And He's come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, the year of Jubilee, the release of all debts, and a new beginning for the world.
- C. At this point in the synagogue service, trumpets should have resounded. It should have just gotten wild up in there. We should be talking about celebration now. But instead we're talking about rejection.
- D. Think about this. Last week the Chicago Cubs won the World Series for the first time since 1908. Now the game was won in Cleveland, but what do you think was going on back in Chicago, back in the Cubs hometown, when they made that last out? We're talking about tens of thousands of fans, out in the Chicago cold, in the streets around Wrigley Field, going nuts!
 - 1. But now imagine if instead of streamers, and cheering, and singing, and tears of joy, the streets were filled with boos, and hissing, and sobbing. Nobody does that.
- E. And yet when Jesus rolls in to His hometown of Nazareth and says: "What you all have been waiting over 400 years for, I'm getting that started today!"—that's exactly what the home crowd does.
 - 1. Something is wrong here. Something is wrong with us. Fallen man knows perfectly well how to celebrate a baseball game, but he has no idea how to properly respond to His Creator and Redeemer. Our hearts, our emotions, are so twisted.
 - a. We reject the very One who proclaims our release!
 - i. But so it must be. For, in fact, Jesus' rejection (which culminates in His crucifixion) will ultimately become the very means of our release!
- F. So this morning, I want to continue making our way through this text by looking in particular at: (1) Our Rejection Postponed; and (2) His Rejection Previewed.

(1) Our Rejection Postponed

What Jesus Does Not Say

- A. What Jesus does not say is just as important as what He does say. Last week we looked at what He does say—in vv. 18-21 in particular. I want to begin this morning with what He does not say.
- B. I'm interested, in particular, in what He does not read from the passage He's quoting in [Isa 61:1-2](#).
 - 1. When we go back to this text in the OT, we realize that He pulls up short. He actually stops reading in the middle of v. 2, cutting off the flow of Isaiah's thought.

- C. Here's the text in Isaiah: "¹The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God..." (Isa 61:1–2).
1. Where the ESV puts a period in [Luke 4:19](#), there should be an ellipses. Isaiah's sentence isn't done!
 - a. But it's not really the ESV's fault, right? Jesus is the One who puts a period at this point. And He's trying to say something with this.
- D. The Jews, it seems, understood the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance to be coming in as one historical moment. God would come, deliver the Jewish people by trampling on their enemies.
1. But Jesus, by ending His reading where He does, in effect, divides the one historical moment into two. "I have come to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and to postpone the day of the Lord's vengeance, because, though you naively think that day would go well for you, it will not. So we're going to hold off on that day of wrath, and I want to talk to you about grace. I want to help you get into God's favor."
- E. And, of course, we know ultimately how Jesus gets us into the favor of God. The day of vengeance, the day that would have been our rejection by God, is postponed for us, but it comes in early for Him on the cross.
1. He puts Himself forward to receive the vengeance, the wrath, the rejection that we deserve for our sin, so that the favor of God that He alone deserves could be given to us by faith.
 - a. Christ takes the day of vengeance, I get the year, the eternity of favor. For those who are in the Son, God is now fully and forever for you!

Never Vengeance, Only Favor

- A. Can I just meditate on this with you for a moment. I want to think about our trials in light of this truth.
- B. If you are a believer, no trial, no suffering that ever comes your way is punitive, is punishment.
 1. Some of us feel like we have more than enough evidence to build the case that God hates us, that He's not fully and forever for us, He's against us, He's angry with us, He has it out for us, He's taking vengeance on us.

- a. But, dearly beloved, without minimizing your trials and sufferings, let me humbly suggest that the cross won't allow for such thoughts! The death of Christ on the cross is the end of God's wrath against you!
- C. The trials, the sufferings, are no longer punitive, they are redemptive, formative, strangely, evidences of His love and not of His wrath.
- D. If I could put an image on this. Imagine yourself as an unrefined block of marble. As God sets to work on us, we're thinking He's coming at us with a sledgehammer. It feels like He's destroying us.
 - 1. But it's not a sledgehammer in His hand. It's a chisel. If you are in Christ, it's a chisel. He's redeeming, forming, making you more and more into Him image, making you something you could never be otherwise.
- E. No one was looking at Michelangelo, when he was working on The David, saying: "Man, you're destroying that rock." No! He's making a masterpiece. If they stop him because they think he's just a crazy dude with a mean streak, then the rock just stays a rock, a disfigured mass.
 - 1. But if they trust him, if they let him at it, then you end up with a sculpture that people have been traveling the world to see for the last 500 years!
- F. Can you see it?! God has no more wrath for you Christian! Even when it hurts, He is for you!

(2) His Rejection Previewed (vv. 22-30)

Why Was Jesus Rejected?

- A. Now, as we read [vv. 22-30](#) we start to deal with the synagogue's response to Jesus' announcement. And though there seems to be this moment of awe at the beginning, that awe quickly gives way to utter rejection.
- B. I want to look at this carefully. I want to know why do Jesus' hometown boys reject Him? What causes people to oppose God's grace and resist the advance of His kingdom? I want to know because I want to make sure none of this starts to take root in me, or you!
- C. As we work our way through these verses I will point out three reasons I see that these Jews have for rejecting Jesus.

(1) Jesus Is Too Familiar

- A. For this, read [vv. 22-24](#): " ²² And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?' ²³ And he said to them, 'Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, "Physician, heal yourself." What we

have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’²⁴ And he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.’”

1. While people are marveling, it seems a whisper campaign begins among the crowd: “Wait a minute. I knew this guy as a kid. I’m friends with His dad. What’s He talking about good news, liberty, miracles? You’re talking all this talk in the synagogue. We’re hearing about this stuff in Capernaum. But we don’t see anything. ‘Physician, heal yourself.’”
 - a. In other words: “So your claiming to be the Messiah, Servant, Redeemer...prove it!”
- B. Their rejection starts with familiarity. “Jesus, you can’t be what you claim to be. You’re too familiar. You’re too much like us.”
- C. It’s sad really. The very thing they think disqualifies Him from being a Savior of such magnitude is actually a critical qualification for it.
 1. If only they had read their Bibles carefully they would have remembered that Isaiah prophesies of this Servant: “He grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him” (Isa 53:2).
 2. The author of Hebrews would later fill this idea out: “He had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17).
 - a. The only way He could save us is if He became familiar to us. It’s human beings that deserve to die for their sin, so a human being He must become, if He is to truly die in their place and rise again for their new start.
- D. But there’s this strange phenomenon, maybe you’ve experienced it, where sometimes we can actually be so close to something that we no longer see it rightly anymore.
 1. I think of when Megan and I were in Monterey a couple of weeks ago. We’re sitting in our car parked on a bluff overlooking the ocean. It’s gorgeous. But then you always know the foreign tourists. These guys pull up and they’ve got their cameras ready like they see something spectacular to photograph. I’m looking for a whale off in the distance or something. But come to find they just had to get an epic shot of a seagull that was snacking on bread or some other trash on the ground. Now, I know. You must not be from here. I guess if you’ve never seen a seagull, if you’re not familiar with them, they’re pretty impressive creatures.
 - a. Things that we see all the time, things that we’re familiar with, we just tend to overlook.

- E. This is what was happening in Nazareth with Jesus. And this can happen for us with Him as well.
 - 1. Perhaps we were so moved by the message of God's grace at the beginning, but it just grew familiar to us. The verses that used to glow with glory in our Bibles, now seem boring and cliché. "I've heard that before, show me something new." We no longer go to [Rom 8:28](#) because we already "know" it. But we don't really know it.
 - a. We're so familiar with it that we're no longer faithful to it.
- F. I don't want to get like this with Jesus. I don't want to let my familiarity turn towards complacency or contempt. It doesn't have to. It's not like to get your passion back for God you should step back from your Bible for a couple months. Give it time to get fresh again. No! That's not how this works.
 - 1. You press in to [Rom 8:28](#) or whatever, and you get as familiar as you can, and you pray: "God take me deeper, open my eyes wider. I want to be both growing in my familiarity and my faith."

(2) Jesus Is Too Inclusive

- A. Now, as we move towards the 2nd and 3rd reasons for the Jews' rejection of Jesus, let's read [vv. 25-27](#). To illustrate His point that a prophet is without honor in His hometown, Jesus recalls two stories from the Jewish Scriptures: "²⁵ But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land,²⁶ and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow.²⁷ And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."

 - 1. Elijah and Elisha were prophets in Israel during the time when the kings and the people were just driving the nation off a cliff. They were on the brink of judgment and exile for their idolatry. And Jesus is saying, "Do you remember that time when God sent His prophets to bless and love on those you considered your enemies? Wasn't that awesome?!"
 - a. Jesus might as well have walked over to a chalkboard and run His nails straight down it. Everything in them just starts to crawl! "[When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath](#)" (v. 28).

- B. At this point, we see the next two reasons for their rejection. Reason number two: Jesus is too inclusive.
- C. Women, lepers, they were already outcasts even within Israel in Jesus' day. But Gentile women, and Gentile lepers? That's going too far. How dare Jesus talk as if these outsiders are somehow on equal ground with Israel in God's eyes!

1. Well, they are. And Jesus recalls these stories to remind them that God looks after people not only inside of Israel but outside of it as well. The whole point of blessing Israel was to make them a blessing to the nations!
- D. But fallen man loathes such inclusivity. We like to feel like we are on the inside and others are out. We like to feel like we're special, more special than the next.
1. And the inclusive heart of God is a threat to this: "You mean to tell me that I'm not in the church because I'm better?"
- E. O brothers and sisters it ought not to be this way! The inclusive heart of God should be our delight: "I was the outcast, the outsider, dead in my sin, and God in His grace brought me in, and gave me a place at His table. And let me tell you something, if He can do such a thing for me, even me, O believe me, He can do it for you!"

(3) Jesus Is Too Honest

- A. But there's another, even deeper reason for their rejection of Jesus at this point: Jesus is just being too honest. He's calling out sin in the room and threatening judgment. And they will not hear it.
1. The stories of Elijah and Elisha signaled not just God's acceptance of the outsider, but His rejection of the insider. That's the real punch line. It was when there were "many widows in Israel" (v. 25) and "many lepers in Israel" (v. 27), that God sent His prophets to widows and lepers elsewhere.
- B. Jesus is saying in somewhat subtler terms what Paul and Barnabas would later say to the synagogue in Antioch in Acts 13:46: "⁴⁶ It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you [Jews]. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles."
1. "When you reject the word of God's grace, you get left behind!"
- C. This was just too much for these Jews in Nazareth to handle: "How dare you, little local boy, say this about us?!" They want to keep living the narrative that they're God's A-team. That God is so lucky to have them. And He's saying, you're about to get cut.
- D. We have to ask ourselves, do we want to know the truth? Do we want Jesus to call out our sin and be real with us? Does He have that privilege in our lives, or do we put parameters on Him? "Don't touch this sin, or this idol. Nope. Too far Jesus."
1. We have an image of ourselves that we create, that we like, and then if someone comes with a mirror holds it up and says, "You're not looking so pretty", do we shatter the mirror and keep living our fantasy or do we face it and ask God for help?

He Went Away

- A. Jesus' words are a loving warning to these people. But it's a warning that they refuse to heed: " ²⁸When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰But passing through their midst, he went away" (vv. 28-29).
1. Let me read you the sobering words of one commentator at this point: "So is the majesty of the presence of Jesus. He simply passed through the midst of them and went away. He spoke no angry word, nor did he work any spectacular miracle. He simply walked through the mob. Some have felt that this was itself a miracle – though not the kind of miracle the Nazarenes wanted! As far as is known Jesus never returned to Nazareth. Rejection can be final" (Morris, TNTC).
- B. We must beware: though the year of the Lord's favor is still being proclaimed in the world, the day of His vengeance is coming. And if we reject the Son, He will on that day reject us.
1. Maybe there's someone in here who is just resisting, resisting, resisting: "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts" (Heb 4:7). Receive the Son and be saved.
- C. This whole scene, while sobering for us, is also sweet. For in it we are reminded of why our Savior has come in the first place: "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised . . . [so that] "the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" (Luke 9:22; 24:47).
1. You can be forgiven. He will be fully and forever for you. His rejection is our release!