

*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read,<sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:*

*<sup>18</sup> “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,  
because he has anointed me  
to proclaim good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,  
to set the oppressed free,  
<sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”*

*<sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

*<sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.*

*<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”*

*<sup>24</sup> “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. <sup>27</sup> 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.”*

*<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> 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 off the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:16-30)*

### **Today This Is Fulfilled in Your Hearing**

Usually, there wasn’t too much excitement in this back-country town. Today is different. News about a gifted rabbi—teacher—was spreading throughout the area. Rumor was he could do some pretty miraculous things too! That gifted rabbi just so happened to have grown up in Nazareth. That gifted rabbi is Jesus and he has returned home. Today is Saturday, the Sabbath day, and as it was his custom on the Sabbath, Jesus goes to the synagogue. Think of it like our Sunday that we go to church. He goes for the same reason you go to church too: to pray, to be blessed, to grow in God’s Word gladly hearing and learning it. Seeing Jesus there, the ruler of the synagogue invites Jesus to take part in the service. This is a pretty big day for Nazareth. The homegrown hero is back home to treat them! This had to be have been special for Jesus’ friends, family and relatives still in the area. I wonder, is his mother Mary sitting in the crowd? What about his brothers and sisters?

When it gets to that part in their service Jesus stands up out of respect for the Word of God to read it. The attendant hands Jesus the large scroll; the reading for today is from the book of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus carefully unrolls the scroll. As his eyes roam over the page Jesus finds what he is

looking for and reads, **“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor,”** (v. 18-19). Then Jesus rolls up the scroll and hands it back the attendant who carefully puts the scroll away until next time. At this point every eye in the room stares down Jesus. You could hear a pin drop. What is he going to say? As was the custom for the teaching of the Word, Jesus sits and he speaks, **“Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

God’s people had been waiting for this promise to be fulfilled for hundreds of years! And now, in their presence, Jesus says it is! A new age had come for God’s people. There is actual hope for the hopeless. You who are run down and tired, burnt out and exhausted, here is good news. You who were held captive by sin’s temptations, chained with guilt and shame, held fast by life’s addictions, oppressed with fear over death and Satan, you are set free. You who were blindly following Satan’s lies, lost among the empty promises of this world and your sinful flesh, he gives you sight to see. God’s Chosen One, the Anointed, our Savior Jesus comes to proclaim the Lord’s favor—you have peace with God. He’s the paid the debt and throws away your IOU. No need to worry what tomorrow will bring; God is now on your side. No need to worry about how this will all turn out; you have God’s favor. You don’t have to wait for it; you are in the year of the Lord’s favor today. Today—not just in Jesus’ day in Nazareth—today, now, this is fulfilled in your hearing. How can we not be amazed along with them?

But then something happens. This all sounds great; amazing. But, **“Is this not Joseph’s son?”** The Nazarenes like what they hear but this is Jesus. I mean, they knew him. He helped Joseph make that table for mom’s house, perhaps. She remembers how he was just so big going to school with her own kids. They know Jesus. They know Jesus’ family. **“Isn’t this Joseph’s son? We know you Jesus! You came from the same back-country town as we did.”** They cannot get around the fact that this Jesus is the one who is going to make it happen.

We know this feeling too. We hear the Word. We like what it says. But then something gets in the way. How often is it stopped before reaching your ears because you don’t feel like being here today, you’re having a hard time focusing and staying awake, other things have your attention and more things will need your attention later, other things—dare you admit—that you feel are more important. How many sermons die in the narthex? The good work that happens here is either forgotten or squashed before you even reach the church doors. Or is it the person sharing the Word that is getting in the way for you? **“Is this not the pastor who isn’t doing what I think he should be doing as a pastor? Is this not the pastor who just irks/bugs me in a certain way? Is this not the pastor who said something I just didn’t agree with? Is this not the pastor who is still kind of young; surely he doesn’t quite get it?”** And the underlying theme: why should I listen to him?

Jesus already knows what they are going to say: **“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum,’”** (v.23). Before they are willing to believe Jesus’ claim, they will want some proof. The physician must be able to heal himself before other people are going to go to him to be healed. Jesus should do the same miraculous things they had been hearing about happening in the town of Capernaum. Once he does that, then we can start talking.

Sounds easy enough, doesn't it? We might find ourselves wishing something similar. We want to see proof that the Word is actually working. We demand proof for why we should listen to God's Word and that it still applies to our lives today. The promises that God gives, the fulfillment that we see in the past aren't good enough. We demand to see proof today, with our own eyes, that he is going to do these things. We hear the Good News but want something more for why I should continually set aside time and grow in it. We want more than just the fact God's Word tells us so. You say this is fulfilled in our hearing today, Jesus, show us.

Sounds easy enough. Just do a couple of miracles Jesus. Do what they ask and you have them! You had them in the first half hanging from every syllable coming off your lips. They were amazed. You were so close! You can still save this one Jesus!

Instead, he presses forward: "**No prophet is welcome in his hometown.**" Familiarity breeds contempt. Rejection to the messenger and God's Word—no matter how great, wonderful, and amazing it sounds—should come as no surprise. It's especially difficult in your hometown. It's nothing new. Jesus then reminds of some history. There were plenty of widows in Israel during the Prophet Elijah's time in the Old Testament when there wasn't any food in all the land. But that's not where God sent his prophet. There were plenty of lepers in Israel in the Prophet Elisha's day in the Old Testament. But they weren't the ones God healed. The Word of God wasn't good enough for the people in their day either. They rejected the Word and God's prophets to their own harm. The benefits were theirs to receive but they did not listen and believe so God's grace is showered upon outsiders. Not God's Chosen People Israel; the non-Jews, the Gentiles.

Jesus is warning the Nazarenes: You are no different than your unbelieving ancestors. If you fail to listen, to repent and turn from your sin, if you continue to not believe, God will take his gifts from you and give them to someone who will appreciate it.

They've heard enough. "How dare he? How could he call us unbelievers? How could he compare us to them?" They weren't going to let this carpenter's son say such things to them! The once docile and quiet crowd turns into ugly, pure, unadulterated rage. It's not hard to imagine a mob of screaming, angry people, pushing and shoving each other pushing and shoving Jesus out of town to the edge of the cliff. No need for a trial. They all heard it. Shove him over the edge. This man must die!

That escalated quickly! But then think about how you respond when the mirror of God's Law shows you your sin. How do you respond when there's talk of money in the church? How do you respond when the Word shows your priorities to be sinful? How do you respond when it reveals an attitude, how you talk about, how you treat other groups of people that does not love her neighbor? How do you respond when God's Word reveals a heart that is not trusting him but demanding proof while doubting his good will and promises? Do you get angry? Or do you not care? Do you try to push the Word off the cliff of your mind picking and choosing what you want to hear? Does it go in one ear, out the other, hoping it will just fall off the proverbial cliff while you continue ignoring it.

Whether out-right rage, doubt, anger, or apathy—not caring—it's a rejection of the Word. And sadly, that is the norm when it comes to the Good News Jesus brings. When this is you, repent.

The ironic thing is, Jesus does give the Nazarenes what they demand. They try to kill him. Miraculously he passes right through them and goes on his way to do exactly what he told them would happen. The people of Nazareth had rejected the Word, so he will take it elsewhere. It wasn't time for him to die, yet. He still has more work to do, more teaching, more preaching. This rejection is something he would face time and again throughout his ministry. But he would not let this slow him down. He goes forward all the way to the court of Pontius Pilate where the people would reject him once again as they cry out, "Crucify him." Only this time was different. He could have walked away from that cross. He could have passed through the crowds to safety from that hill of Calvary just as easily as he did from that cliff at Nazareth. But this time he doesn't. He is the Lord's Anointed. He was chosen not to win a popularity contest. It wasn't to just teach and wow the crowds, to perform wondrous deeds and miraculous signs. He came here to take our place. On that cross he would face the worse rejection when his Father turns his back on him for the doubtful, Word-rejecting, sinful hearts he claims to be his own. Despised by men and forsaken by God, Jesus dies.

But he is the Lord's Anointed whose blood pays your debt and grants you pardon and release from captivity to sin and its temptations. He leads us out from the dark prison cell of unbelief and gives us sight to see and hearts that believe sins are forgiven in his name. He crushes the great oppressing Satan's head and declares you free from sin and its shame. And when your living Savior rises from the dead he breaks you free from the chains of death so that we might live forever with him. Peace be with you. You are living in the year of the Lord's favor. He blesses and keeps you and makes his face upon you.

Today this Scripture is fulfilled as you go back to those baptismal waters dying to sin and rising again the new free person Jesus has made you to say "No" to sin and "Yes" to godly living. It's fulfilled as you hear again his message: your sins are forgiven in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It's fulfilled when we gather at the Lord's Supper and he grants you pardon and peace with his body and blood given and poured out for you with the bread and wine. Today it is fulfilled as his Word is poured into your ears and onto your hearts. It's fulfilled as he works in you and through you to carry out his good purpose as we love and serve neighbor. Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing. How are you going to respond? Amen.