

**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, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:**

**18 “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,  
19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”[f]**

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

**22 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.**

**23 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.’”**

**24 “Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. 25 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. 26 Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. 27 And there were many in Israel with leprosy[g] in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”**

**28 All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 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. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.**

How well do you know Jesus? Jesus surprised people. He often did or said things that were unexpected, and that can be true even today. Sometimes you’ll hear general characterizations of Jesus that aren’t entirely accurate. The truth can still be surprising. I’ve heard this one: “Jesus accepted everyone for who they were.” But then we read that Jesus called some people blind guides or sons of hell, he criticized the way some people worshiped and told others to quit a sinful lifestyle. Or the characterization that Jesus was always gentle. That doesn’t fit the account of Jesus chasing people away with a whip and flipping over tables. Sometimes we might assume that everything happened the way Jesus wanted it to, but that’s not true either. Jesus cried while

overlooking the city of Jerusalem because he longed to gather them to himself, but they were not willing.

Here's another example of things not going the way Jesus would have wanted it to go. Jesus was rejected in his own hometown. That's the account we get to focus on today. As we think about Luke 4, we'll see this truth uncovered, that rejection is not the exception, but the rule. It's not a rare occurrence, but a common one. This has important implications for us today and will be worthwhile to ponder.

Let's start at the end. **"All the people in the synagogue were furious (when they heard this). 29 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."** How did Jesus get himself into this situation? Later on, as he thought about this day in Nazareth, what were his takeaways? What would yours be? Maybe, "Well, that didn't work! I guess I'm not doing that again!" Or, "Next time I'll have to change my strategy." So what was Jesus' strategy? How did he get himself into a situation where people intended to throw him off a cliff?

Now let's go back. Jesus had been brought up in Nazareth. It was his original hometown. He was born in Bethlehem, but not because his mother lived there. They had gone to Bethlehem for Caesar Augustus's census. Mary was from Nazareth, and so that's where Jesus grew up with his mother and Joseph. He grew up, and then he left his hometown around the age of 30 to begin his ministry. He had been preaching and healing in the surrounding area and also farther away in and around the big city of Jerusalem. In Luke 4, Jesus, with a growing reputation, returns home. Hometown hero? It seems like many towns are proud when someone makes it big. Maybe we'd expect to see it on the sign—"You are entering Nazareth, home of Jesus." Jesus attended the synagogue service back home, because that's what he always did, wherever he was. The Nazareth synagogue was buzzing this Sabbath day because of him. He was one of the readers for the day—in the synagogue it was normal for a visitor to read and teach. He read mostly from Isaiah 61, probably a very similar routine to what we do here. Then Jesus sat down, not because he was done, but because that's how the teachers taught in the synagogue, from a seated position. His sermon began very simply and honestly, **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** In other words, I am the one the Old Testament prophets were looking forward to. The reaction was interesting. The people said nice things about him. They thought he was a good speaker. But they still ended up on a hill outside the city, intending to throw him off a cliff. How did they get there? What did Jesus do wrong?

Jesus was a good preacher. More than one place in Scripture says that. He preached with authority. He got people's attention. And yet Jesus was rejected. That's not something we're used to thinking about Jesus. It looked like he was a failure at times. Jesus was rejected. And it wasn't because he made a mistake. It wasn't because he went about things the wrong way. Jesus simply and honestly spoke the truth, and he spoke it well. But the people in Nazareth rejected him.

Should we expect anything different? Jesus was rejected. The apostles were rejected—that's what they were dealing with in the reading from Acts. Should we think that if we just get the

right kind of pastor and package God's Word in the right way and reach people with the right methods and try to hide things that you think might be offensive, that then people will follow and believe? Rejection is not the exception, but the rule. Rejection doesn't mean that a mistake has been made in the preaching or teaching of the gospel. It's always been this way. Jesus pointed out that a widow from outside Israel benefited from Elijah's ministry. Why outside of Israel? It wasn't because there was no one inside Israel needed Elijah's help. But the people inside Israel rejected what he had to say. Jesus pointed out that Naaman, a non-Israelite man with leprosy was healed by Elisha. That's not because there were no lepers in Israel. But the people in Israel had rejected what Elisha had to say. When God sent these prophets to people outside Israel, it was a statement of condemnation on those inside—on those who should have known better, those who had the word preached among them on a regular basis.

Should we expect anything different? If people aren't following, if people are leaving, must we try something new? Do we need to change, just because we don't go viral? Jesus was rejected. Christians who present the simple, honest truth of God's word will be too.

But here's what our God is like: he can do amazing things with rejection. Rejection does not equal defeat for God. No, it does not mean failure. Rejection of God's word and of God's people, when it comes, is just the next thing he will use for the good of his kingdom and therefore the good of his people. Jesus' rejection led to his death—his arrest, condemnation, and death. Jesus didn't savor that experience. In fact, he prayed that it might pass; he prayed that he might possibly avoid that kind of rejection, and God said no. God said no, not because rejection is a noble goal, but because God had in mind to use this rejection for Jesus' good and for yours, for your salvation won on the cross.

Rejection is not the exception. If we face rejection for a simple and honest presentation of God's word, and God refuses to take it away, we are following Jesus' path, and we can trust that God can and will use it for good. Stick with it! Don't be discouraged! Stand firm in the simple, honest truth of God's word.

Rejection is not the exception. That's the sad truth about human nature. And let's be careful that we don't let our guard down and assume that rejection just happens somewhere else, by people who don't know Jesus well. Elijah and Elisha were rejected by people who should have known better. Jesus was rejected by his hometown.

Let's think about who rejected Jesus on this day in Luke 4. His hometown. People who knew him. **"Isn't this Joseph's son?"** They knew his father Joseph, which means they knew Jesus as he was growing up. They knew him too well. At least they thought they did. They were so familiar with him that when Jesus claimed to be something more than Joseph's son, they assumed they knew better. It turns out they didn't really know him well at all.

Sometimes those who know Jesus best don't know him well at all. The temptation is lurking for you too! How well do you know Jesus? Some of us have known him our entire lives. I knew a man who came to understand and trust the gospel later in life as an adult, and he was blown away by the counter-cultural concepts in God's word, but he couldn't understand the apathy of the

people who had supposedly known these things their whole lives. Sometimes those who know Jesus best don't know him well at all. We can recite the Lord's Prayer and the Creed without fully understanding the enormous concepts coming from our lips. Hear the words and works of Jesus and immediately reduce your mental effort because you know how the story goes, and so we miss how breath-taking and surprising Jesus really is.

Sometimes the ones who know him best don't know him well at all—it's a temptation for us too! Let's keep the mental effort up as we listen because Jesus said that it's through listening to his word that he accomplishes all the big promises and gifts that he offers. **"This Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing,"** as you listen.

What does he offer? **"good news to the poor...freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free...the year of the Lord's favor."** Yes, for you too! Part of the agreement God made with Israel in the Old Testament was that the people would celebrate a year of jubilee every 50 years. During this year of jubilee, debts would be canceled and servants would be freed. It was a celebration of freedom—not a freedom to do whatever they wanted, but the freedom of not owing anything to anyone. In Jesus' sermon today he announces that that's what he brings to you—the freedom of not owing God anything.

You are poor before the Lord because you have piled up debt with your apathy, your venom, your lack of love for others. But when you listen to Jesus, it's the year of jubilee. Yes, for you too! You know how to say you're a sinner and that Jesus died for you, but sometimes you do it without thinking, while your conscience is telling you that you better change and become more worthy. It's the year of jubilee! Jesus paid your debt with his death. It's the time of God's favor, for you too! You don't have to make up anything to God, you don't have to prove anything to God. Your debt is gone. You're loved, you're treasured, you're worthwhile, because Jesus preached that to you and you listened, as you listened that promise to you was fulfilled, and it continues to be fulfilled and accomplished whenever you listen. Believe it! Trust that!

Rejection is not the exception, but the rule. And sometimes it comes from those who think they know him best. But Jesus doesn't give up. He continued to preach. He continued to the cross. He doesn't withhold his offer of freedom, of forgiveness, of making you honored in God's sight. Let's hold firm to the simple, honest truth of God's word. As we continue to listen to it, he will fulfill his promises to you.