

Epiphany 4
January 31, 2016

“Jesus Gets Booted Out of His Hometown of Nazareth”

LUKE 4:20-32

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 and 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! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’” ²⁴ “I tell you the truth,” 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 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 down the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. ³¹ Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. ³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.

Have you ever stepped into a hornet’s nest? I can still see the swarm of yellow jackets streaming out of the abandoned gopher hole. Within in seconds they were all over my body. Yellow jackets or hornets don’t sting, they bite and they bite multiple times. They inject their saliva into your body and it burns like fire and itches for days. I had to make an emergency trip to the hospital to get a shot to prevent an anaphylactic reaction.

Jesus stepped into a hornet’s nest when he preached his first sermon in the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth. At first the people were so happy to welcome their hometown boy who was becoming famous for his preaching and the miracles. They wanted to jump up and down and shout out, “That’s our boy!” But then they turned against him, madder than hornets

And so we ask ourselves this morning what was it that turned these people against Jesus? What made them boot him out of the synagogue and drag him out of town to throw him over a cliff? Jesus dared to tell these people the truth. He was their loving Shepherd who did not want them to spend eternity in hell because of their wrong understanding of who he was and what he had come to do for them. As I worked on this sermon I just kept thinking about how these people who loved Jesus could so quickly turned on him. Could this ever happen today? Could people turn on Jesus and give him the boot just because he does not meet their expectations?

See the smiles of approval

Let's take a closer look at the people who gathered in the synagogue of Nazareth. They are all smiles on the Sabbath day when the leaders of the synagogue hand over the scroll of the prophet Isaiah to Jesus. See them smile as he stands up to read the words that we heard in our sermon last week: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach the good news to the poor..." See them smile as he finishes the reading and then rolls up the scroll and hands it over to attendant.

The custom was to stand up and read the verses and sit down to explain them. Jesus did that. The people were all smiles. This is their Jesus, their hometown boy who is becoming famous. What words will come from his mouth that will send them home saying, "Wow wasn't he great?" Jesus sits down and says to these people whom he dearly loves, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus wanted every person sitting there that day to believe that he was the Messiah promised in Isaiah who would be anointed with the Holy Spirit.

Notice their reaction to Jesus' words about the Scripture being fulfilled in him. "All spoke well of him at the gracious words that came from his lips. 'Isn't this Joseph's son?' they asked?" See the smiles as they hear the gracious words from the mouth of Jesus. They knew Jesus and the gracious words he spoke whenever people came to carpenter shop in Nazareth or when he worshipped in the synagogue. But don't you see some of the smiles begin to change to worry or doubt or concern or even anger? How can this son of Joseph the carpenter claim he is the Messiah? He's just our Jesus, our hometown boy. How can he claim that these words from Isaiah were speaking about him?

See the smiles on the faces of people even today as they hear the name of Jesus and think about him as one of the greatest people who has ever lived. In his book *Born Again* Charles Colson tells how he grew up having this great respect and love for Jesus as a model teacher, but he did not believe Jesus was his Lord and God. This past week in my personal devotions I was reading from John five where Jesus said to the leaders of the Jewish people, "My Father is always at work to this very day, and I, too, am working." The Jewish leaders were all smiles if Jesus was just another great teacher or rabbi. In John 5 we read they wanted to kill him because he called God his Father and made himself equal to God.

Just to tie this all together, I have brought out my meter to illustrate how happy the people of Nazareth were when Jesus stood up to read from the scroll of Isaiah. I think we can safely say on a scale of one to ten, their joy level was a ten. So we ask how did this shift from a level ten in joy to a level ten in anger and hatred for Jesus? This happened when Jesus told the people the truth about themselves that they did not want to hear.

See the faces of hatred and anger

So what causes these people to grind their teeth in anger towards Jesus? "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 Galilee.'" Jesus knew exactly what these people were thinking about him. It wasn't good. They were looking for a sermon that would wow them and bring in large crowds of people similar to what had been happening in Galilee. They wanted Jesus to perform miracles of healing just as he had done in Galilee.

Look at all those people following Jesus to see miracles. When he crosses the Sea of Galilee they run to get where his boat landed so they could see him perform more miracles. They welcomed him into Jerusalem with shouts of "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" hoping to see more miracles. When he did not meet their expectations and went to the cross to die, they ridiculed and mocked him even as he was suffering and dying on the cross.

Jennifer was baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit at the age of ten. She came to church and Sunday school with friends because her father was an atheist and her mother could care less about going to church. At the age of twelve she stopped coming to church and Sunday school because in her words, "She asked Jesus to give her a horse and he did not answer her prayers." Our sinful nature does not want Jesus to die on the cross for us. Our sinful nature wants a hundred thousand things that are more exciting in life and more important than who Jesus is and what he has done for us. How quickly we can pray for something easy and comfortable rather than taking up our cross and following him.

Oh how Jesus loved these people in his hometown. They needed him to tell them the truth. "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." They knew what Jesus was referring to. They knew how the Lord sent a terrible drought at the time of Elijah sent because the people were worshipping the false god Baal instead of the Lord. They knew how God's people had rejected Elijah and even tried to have him put to death. They knew how he found refuge with a widow in Zarephath who only had a handful of flour and a little oil to eat before she and her son starved to death. God miraculously caused that little bit of flour and oil to multiply to keep her and her son and Elijah alive for months.

They also knew the story Jesus told about the prophet Elisha who healed a man from Syria named Naaman of his leprosy. Although there were many people with leprosy in Israel at that time, God chose to have his prophet Elisha heal this man who was a heathen. Remember that gang of kids that taunted the prophet Elisha with the words, "Go up you bald head, go up." They were doing much more than making fun of a bald guy. They were mocking the prophet just as their parents had done. Two she bears came out of the woods and roughed them and taught them a lesson.

What was Jesus trying to say to these people whom he loved? With these two accounts from the Old Testament he was telling them very clearly and very powerfully that they were rejecting him as their Lord and God and Savior just as the people in the past had rejected the true God with their worship of Baal. They were happy to have Jesus as their hometown hero, but they did not want him as their Messiah who had come to save them and rescue them.

Now see their faces change from smiles to anger and hatred and even fury. Like mad hornets whose nest was disturbed they rush at Jesus and throw him out of the synagogue. They grab him and take him to a steep cliff outside their little city to throw him over the edge and kill him. Tell a Muslim that everything their prophet Mohammed said about

getting into Allah's heaven is totally wrong. Tell them they must believe in Jesus to be saved. They will not smile at you and say, "Thank you for telling me the truth about Jesus Christ." Even people in the circle of your own family and friends will not be happy when you follow in the footsteps of Jesus and let them know how important it is to give up their false beliefs and trust in Jesus for their salvation.

Notice what happened to Jesus. It says that he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. The time was not right for Jesus. Three years later he would let another crowd of people grab him and condemn him and haul him off to be crucified. On that terrible cross he would suffer and pay for the sins of the people in his hometown of Nazareth. He would suffer and pay for the sins of the world. Later he would say of the people of Jerusalem who rejected him. "I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings and you would not."

If you want to get into the Super Bowl next Sunday you cannot say, "I am the best Denver Bronco fan in the world. I cheer the loudest for my team." The only thing that will get you into the big game is a ticket that will cost you thousands of dollars. I think you see where I am going with this. You can stand up and cheer on Jesus as the people of Nazareth did but that will not save you. And all your best works will not remove one sin. You and I desperately need Jesus to provide the ticket to eternal life. He offers his precious blood to wash us clean and his perfect life for us so we can be spared from the judgment to come. That's the only ticket to eternal life.