

Accepted – Luke 4:16-30
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
Union Baptist Church – September 23, 2018

I. INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Have you ever had that strange experience of returning to your hometown and family after a long time away and a after a lot of growth in your life...after college perhaps...or after you started your career or discovered your calling in life...only to find that everyone at home still thinks of you and relates to you as that same person you were when you were growing up? They struggled to accept the transformation God had brought about in your life and relate to you as the new person you'd become. And very likely, you found yourself struggling to confidently be the person you've now become, while back in your hometown environment with the people who've known you since you were a kid.

My brother, Jason, who in his career as a diplomat regularly gave speeches and interacted with dignitaries and world leaders and functioned confidently in these roles, once shared with me how unnerved he was when our dad asked him to give a speech at the Soldotna, Alaska, Rotary Club. He was really worried about it. You see, what he could easily do in Egypt or Israel or Belgium, seemed extremely intimidating with our Dad watching and among the people in the town where he'd grown up. Our hometown crowd, who've put us in a box based on the person we were growing up, can be the toughest and most intimidating crowd out there. They think they have us figured out and struggle to believe we've become anything other than the person they've always known us to be.

Well, today in our study of Scripture, we see Jesus experiencing something similar as he returns to his hometown of Nazareth. Since leaving Nazareth as an ordinary carpenter's son, perhaps only a few months earlier, big things had been happening in Jesus' life. He'd fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and nights while being tempted by the devil. He'd been baptized by John the Baptist and anointed by the Holy Spirit. He'd called several disciples and then turned water to wine at a wedding in Cana. He'd begun publicly teaching at the Passover feast in Jerusalem and created a huge ruckus in the temple by getting a whip and driving out the money changers and animals in the temple courts. He'd performed

miraculous signs in Jerusalem and invited Nicodemus to see and enter the kingdom of God through simple repentance and belief in him. He'd offered living water to a Samaritan woman and then given eternal life in God's kingdom to her and to a whole group of Samaritans. And most recently, he'd returned to the nearby town of Cana, in Galilee, where he miraculously healed a royal official's son who was many miles away in the town of Capernaum.

The simple carpenter's son who had so recently left Nazareth had since been revealed as so much more than the people in his hometown had realized. Oh, they'd heard reports of the miracles he'd done and perhaps many of them had seen them firsthand at the Passover in Jerusalem. But believing that this young man they'd known all their lives was something special was very difficult to do. Familiarity can so often blind our eyes to what we have right in front of us. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to Luke chapter 4, verses 16 to 30.

II. PROCLAIMING GOD'S ACCEPTANCE (Verses 16 to 21)

Let's begin by reading verses 16 through 21, which I've titled, *Proclaiming God's Acceptance*:

16 And [Jesus] 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."

Don't you think you probably could have heard a pin drop at this point? This hometown boy was making a very bold claim and you can feel the tension in these verses: ***the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.***

Well, let's dig into these verses a little bit. We first notice in verse 16 that Jesus had a weekly routine that he followed. It's described as his custom. Every Sabbath day, you could find Jesus in the same place: *the local synagogue*. What was he doing there? He was gathering together with God's people to study, teach and learn from God's Word, much like we're doing here today. In Judaism during the time of Christ, the Hebrew Scriptures (what we call the Old Testament) were read and discussed in the synagogue on Sabbath days. "First came the law, then the prophets, then someone was asked to speak on the texts. Normally one stood up to read out of respect for the scriptures, and then sat down to expound them" (*NetBible.org*). So I've decided to get a comfortable chair and start sitting while I give my sermons! ☺

But in all seriousness, Jesus sets an example for us here, showing us that it's a very good thing to gather together weekly with God's people to study his Word together, encourage each other and worship him as a unified people. If this was the custom of Jesus, this should be our custom as well. As reaffirmed in Hebrews chapter 10, verses 24 to 25:

24 ...let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

What we're doing here on Sundays and during the week at Fellowship Groups and Bible studies is worthwhile and important and essential to our growth in the Lord. Let's let it be our weekly custom as it was for Jesus.

Well, looking back at verses 17 and 18 of Luke chapter 4, we notice that as Jesus stood up to read in the synagogue, the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son were working together on a plan. This plan involved the book of Isaiah and, of course, that "just happened" to be the scroll that was handed to Jesus. And in his sensitivity to the Spirit Jesus knew just what passage to read at this precise moment. Unrolling the scroll to Isaiah 61, verses 1 and 2, he read these prophetic verses that had been written about none other than himself. And he read them

with ownership, saying: ***"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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*** And just in case there was any remaining doubt that Jesus really was claiming to be God's prophesied Anointed One, the Christ, the Messiah, he calmly and patiently sat down with every eye staring him down and said: ***"Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*** He had just revealed to all in the synagogue that day exactly who he claimed to be. Now they would have to decide whether or not to accept his bold claim.

But before examining their response in the coming verses, let's spend a little time thinking about what Jesus just told us about himself and his mission through these 2 powerful verses quoted from Isaiah. First, he told us that the Father had empowered him for the task at hand. *The Spirit of the Lord was upon him.* This is a reference back to the Holy Spirit descending upon him and remaining on him at his recent baptism by John. You see, God never asks human beings to accomplish his will in their own strength, power and wisdom; not even his own Son, Jesus, who, though fully God, is also fully human and was walking through life on earth like you and I, fully dependent on the Spirit to guide, direct and empower him to accomplish the Father's will. Like Jesus, you and I cannot accomplish God's will, fully pleasing to him, without walking continually in the power of the Spirit.

Secondly, Jesus told us that the Spirit was upon him BECAUSE God had anointed him...had set him apart...had given him a specific job to do. This job God the Father had given Jesus to do involved both proclamation and action. Three times we see the word, "proclaim," in these verses. Jesus was anointed and empowered to proclaim a good-news message all around...a good-news message that was for a specific group of people: *the poor*. Who are the poor? Well, the Greek word is *pto-khos*...a word that can certainly mean financially poor, but is much more expansive than that. In addition to financially poor, it includes being destitute of "...influence, position, [and] honor...or [being] lowly, afflicted...or helpless, powerless to accomplish an end...or needy...lacking in anything" (*NetBible.org*)...or poor in spirit.

The message Jesus had been anointed and empowered to proclaim is extremely good news for those who know they need it...for those who've looked beyond the

surface of their daily existence to see the hardness, selfishness and sinfulness of their human heart. But for those who are comfortable in their worldly riches; who are confident in their own abilities; who think they're basically good people; who see no need for God, Jesus message would seem unnecessary and perhaps even foolish...the kind of thing weak-minded, poor and needy people would be drawn to. Jesus message would only be good news to those who recognized their desperate need for it...to those who knew they were chained up to sin, blind to spiritual truth, and subject to God's wrath for their sin.

For those unaware of their need or unwilling to humbly accept Jesus as the Savior they desperately needed, it would actually be bad news, as we'll see shortly. But for the spiritually poor and needy, Jesus had very good news: *You can be freed from slavery to sin; you can have your spiritual eyes opened to true reality; and you can be accepted by God and be at perfect peace with him. And guess what? I'm not only the One proclaiming this wonderful message, but I'm also the One who will make it happen for you. I will break your chains. I will open your eyes. I will forgive your sin, bear your shame, and bring you into the presence of the Father, where you'll be fully known and loved and accepted forever.* Notice in verses 18 and 19 that Jesus is sent not only to proclaim the good news, but to carry it out as well. He's the One who sets at liberty those who are oppressed! He proclaims it and he does it.

Now as you looked over the sermon notes, you may have wondered where I got this idea of acceptance that appears in the title of today's message and is repeated in the sermon note headings. Well, notice that little phrase in verse 19: ***to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*** That word translated, favor, in Greek means accepted or acceptable. Thus the phrase could be better translated: ***the acceptable year of the Lord.*** The idea is that Jesus is proclaiming the time period when sinful people have an opportunity to have their sin dealt with forever – total forgiveness – so that they can be forever accepted by the Lord and received into his presence – fully known, loved and accepted forever. My friends, the day of acceptance is here right now through Jesus alone. Being fully accepted by and loved by God our Creator is a living reality for all those who've repented of their sin and trusted Jesus Christ alone for salvation. And understanding and living in this acceptance and love is the transforming reality that will guide us into the life God intends for us as his beloved children.

Today is the day of the Lord's acceptance. Praise God! We're in the time period of history when God's inviting all people to get right with him through Jesus Christ. He's giving us every opportunity and he desires that all people seize that opportunity and come to him through simple repentance and faith in Christ. But the day of the Lord's acceptance will come to an end. The Old Testament is full of examples of how God's calls to repentance, when repeatedly ignored, are eventually withdrawn and all that remains is judgment and wrath for sin. If you look back at that Isaiah passage that Jesus quoted, you'll noticed that Jesus stopped reading in the middle of a verse at a very interesting place. In Isaiah 61, verse 2, the passage reads this way: ***to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God...***

You see, Jesus' first coming to earth as God's anointed was to proclaim the time period of God's acceptance and favor...the time period when we all have an opportunity to be accepted by him through Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6, verse 2: ***...now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*** But Jesus' second coming as God's anointed at the end of the age will be to bring ***the day of vengeance of our God*** to all those who have rejected God's offer of acceptance through Christ...an offer he's been extending, by the way, for nearly 2,000 years now. Don't wait until it's too late, because Jesus' message is bad news for those who refuse to accept it.

III. DISBELIEVING GOD'S ACCEPTANCE (Verses 22 to 27)

Well, let's continue reading now in verses 22 to 27 and see how the people of Nazareth responded to the bold claims Jesus had just made about himself. I've called this section: *Disbelieving God's Acceptance:*

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."

Well, in verse 22, we notice a big contrast. Everything Jesus was saying was being recognized by the people in the synagogue as godly and gracious and good. Nothing was inconsistent with Scripture and he was communicating God's truth in a powerful and engaging way. There was much evidence that God was speaking truth through him and people were amazed at the words coming out of his mouth. They had also heard about the miracles he had performed in other towns, most recently in Capernaum. However, as they considered the bold claim Jesus had just made to be God's anointed One, they just couldn't get past the fact that Jesus had grown up in their town. They'd known him most of his life and that familiarity with him made them skeptical and wanting more proof. How could this simple carpenter's son be the Messiah? "He's going to need to prove it to us personally," was on their minds.

And Jesus through the Spirit knew what was going on in their hearts. He knew his claim was being met with skepticism and unbelief and that they weren't about to accept him as their Messiah. Interestingly, Jesus was really giving his hometown people a special opportunity to know his true identity. This was a well-recognized Messianic passage from Isaiah and he clearly stated that it had just been fulfilled in their hearing. Rarely was Jesus so clear in stating that he is the Messiah. And yet, his hometown people were about to miss an incredible opportunity because of their pre-conceived notions of Jesus and their unwillingness to trust the evidence already set before their eyes.

Well, Jesus cuts right to the chase. Never afraid to boldly confront what's really going on and get to the heart of the issue, Jesus tells them what they're thinking. He reveals the thoughts on their minds. Before they have a chance to say it, he tells them what they're about to say – more evidence for them that he is who he says he is. He tells them that what they're about to say is something like this: *If you're really the Messiah, prove it for us here in your own hometown. We need more signs if we're going to believe something that incredible about an ordinary guy who grew up right here among us.* There was a strong spirit of prideful unbelief in the people of Nazareth as later events in the gospels will reveal, and Jesus called it out here. And he followed it up with this chilling statement: ***Truly,***

I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. I say, “chilling,” because in order for them to become *acceptable* to God, their hometown prophet would need to become *acceptable* to them.

Jesus next moves to drive the “*unbelief in the hometown prophet*” point home, and warn them of what’s happened in the past when God’s people have persisted in stubborn unbelief and rejected his calls for repentance. He uses two examples to make his point, both taken from one of the lowest points in Israel’s history, when wicked kings were leading Israel into full rebellion against God. The first example is from the time of Elijah, when Israel was under a 3 ½ year disciplinary famine while Ahab was king. Many widows in Israel were starving during that time, but Elijah was only sent to miraculously help one widow who lived outside of Israel in the land of Sidon. The second example was from the time of Elijah’s successor, Elisha, and a very similar thing happened. Though there were many lepers in Israel, Elisha only miraculously cleansed one man...a foreigner from Syria.

There are at least 3 truths that emerge from these examples Jesus was sharing with the unbelieving people in Nazareth. First, God determines where and when and for whom miracles are performed and doesn’t perform them when people are trying to test him and make him prove himself. Secondly, miracles are performed for the believing asking in faith, not for those persisting in stubborn unbelief in spite of all the evidence already available. And thirdly, when God’s chosen people, Israel, were under his discipline for their wickedness and stubborn unbelief, his miraculous working was withheld from them and shared with others outside Israel. The same would be true in this present case if they persisted in their unbelief.

Jesus’ points were quite clear, and as we’ll see momentarily, were fully understood by the people in Nazareth. They heard something like this: *In rejecting your hometown prophet in spite of all the evidence and testimony you’ve already received, you’re behaving like the stubborn, rebellious, unbelieving Israelites of the past, who killed their prophets and rejected God’s message he was giving through them. Beware, or you’ll miss the day of God’s acceptance by not accepting the Savior he has provided.*

You may think Jesus is being a little harsh here or expecting too much of these people too fast. But remember, Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, was able to see into hearts and minds and know with certainty what was really going on within people. He knew the darkness and unbelief and pride that was lurking underneath the surface of these people from his hometown. And his intention was to wake them up and expose the darkness in their hearts so they could then see their need and eventually be ready to accept him as their Messiah.

IV. REJECTING GOD'S ACCEPTANCE (Verses 28 to 30)

Well, wake them up he did, as we'll see in our final verses for today, verses 28 to 30, which I've labeled: *Rejecting God's Acceptance*:

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.

Jesus seems to have touched a raw nerve, don't you think? What was lurking inside their hearts came out for all to see in a burst of murderous wrath. Angered and offended beyond reason by Jesus' calling out of their heart issues, they formed a mob and prepared to murder this young man who had grown up in their hometown. From speaking well of him and marveling at the gracious and godly words coming out of his mouth, they turned in an instant to destroy him...against Roman law by the way. The Jewish people were forbidden by the Romans to carry out religious capital punishment. The smooth veneer of "religious" people and the shiny gloss of supposedly "good" people, can disappear so quickly in the face of offense. But hopefully that's when they begin to recognize their desperate need as the darkness in their hearts becomes visible for all to see.

But in spite of the angry mob here and their attempts to finish Jesus off on a Nazareth cliff, God had other plans and Jesus simply passed through their midst and went his way. His good news message of hope and salvation moved on to others as it was rejected by the people of Nazareth.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

As we begin to wrap up today, let's not miss the central message of this passage of Scripture. I can express it in seven simple words: *As we accept Jesus God accepts us.* The day of God's acceptance is here now, and if we are in Christ, through repentance and faith in him, God accepts us like he accepts his own Son. The same eternal love he has for his own Son, he now has for us. Do you feel accepted by God right now? Or do you feel that he's still needing you to step up a little in order to be worthy of his love and approval? My friends, none of us are or ever will be worthy of God's acceptance and love...Only Christ is worthy...but he has invited us to be worthy in Christ. In Christ – with our sins forgiven, our eyes opened, and our chains broken – we are accepted and loved and treasured forever by our God. And he invites us to begin living his new life out of that secure place of acceptance and security and love that never changes. Only in that place do we find the freedom to be honest and repent when we sin, without fear of God rejecting us; to be real about who we are and the challenges we're facing; and to begin walking into the new life God has planned for us. And only in firsthand experience of the steadfast, unchanging love of God do we begin desiring him above all the empty things the world has to offer.

I want to close now with just a couple final truths we've uncovered in this passage we've studied today. First, the Holy Spirit is so essential to everything about our walk with God and the accomplishing of his purposes. The Holy Spirit enables us to both proclaim his message effectively and carry out his will, and he's the one that brings the growth and the fruit. Let's learn to walk by the Spirit as we learn to pray continually. If Jesus needed the Spirit to carry out his mission, we even more so!

And finally, we saw once again that recurring truth that humility and simple trusting obedience is the way to life connected with God in his kingdom. Pride and stubborn unbelief keep us from the kingdom life God graciously offers to us. Are humility and simple trust evident in the way you're living your life right now, in your interactions with other people, and in the way you relate to God? God lead us there so that we live our lives just like our Master, Jesus Christ...soft and pliable in your hands and ready to go wherever you lead us.