

Luke 4:14-30 – Amazed by Grace

-- Read Luke 4:14-30

-- Pray

Why does Jesus say that no prophet is accepted in his hometown? That is the question of the week, even as it was last week, and today, it is my prayer that as we examine this question further, God will bring growth to our spirits through knowledge of Him and biblical insights into some of our own sinful tendencies.

Last week we looked at what I believe is the best answer to this question by noting that hometown folks tend to treat their hometown prophets with a spirit of entitlement. That is to say that, if we do not vigilantly oppose the tragic “What’s in it for me?” approach to the Christian life and the church that was clearly evident on that day in Nazareth, then we are bound to reject and despise the consistently selfless, God-focused, others-centered attitude that Christ demands when he says in Matthew 16:24, *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.”*

Today, I want to examine a second important answer to this question as to why Jesus says that a prophet is not accepted in his hometown, and that is this: we have a tendency to flout the familiar. In other words, we tend to have precious little regard for the things that we see and do all the time. This explanation is not a novel one on my part. Indeed, this observation about human nature is the way that most scholars have traditionally explained what Jesus means when He says, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.” And this explanation is given for good reason; it reveals some potent truths. For example, this explanation argues that people from a prophet’s hometown usually know that person too well to accept his testimony as God’s prophet. This is certainly a quality observation: We do tend to diminish that with which we are accustomed. Notice that, in verse 22, even as the people are awed and inspired by Jesus’ words, they were asking, “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”, as if to say, “Isn’t this the one with whom we have become so familiar over the past 30 years?”. Last week, we pointed out some of the deficiencies of this explanation, but today, we are going look at its merits with the goal of becoming amazed by God’s grace for His glory and for our growth.

There can be little doubt that you and I are prone to flout the familiar. To illustrate this point, let us look at a contemporary example of this phenomenon of human nature, one to which I think we will all be able to relate (especially old-timers like me). Consider our response to cell phones, for example... Y know, for

our children and youth growing up today, it is nothing to them that people everywhere carry around cell phones with which they can communicate with each other any time and in virtually any place. In other words, cell phones are really no big deal anymore. Maybe I am revealing the onset of old age here, but this common feature of modern life still blows me away. When I was kid the modern cell phone revolution in which we find ourselves today was utterly unthinkable.

-- Illustration – Old rotary phones

-- Recall the first time I saw car phones – On *The A-Team*, I think – A hoity-toity bad guy so extremely wealthy that he even had a car phone!

However, kids of today consider cell phones, as well as innumerable other modern technologies, to be rather mundane features of ordinary life. To them, these amazing devices are really not very amazing; they are just “things” that we have and use everyday. Not only so, but nowadays, especially with cell phones, not only are these technologies thought of as a regular part of life, but many people, especially teenagers (it seems), have come to believe that we are *entitled* to have them. For example, in high schools today, a teenager without her own personal cell phone is apt to consider herself stricken some sort of hideous social disease—call it “cellphoneulitis.” “But Dad,” they say, “if I don’t have a cell phone of my very own, I will surely die a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad, social death. Not only that,” they often continue, “but until I get one, I am going to pout and moan and complain and argue until you give me what I so desperately need!” I wonder if that sounds familiar to anyone...

Kids, Youth, even Adults, listen to me now... I can tell you with confidence that there are countless places in the world where people would do flips to have any kind of phone at all, even one of those old rotary phones stuck to the wall. And there are still other places where people wouldn’t know a cell phone from a really fancy rock. Yet, you and I have become so familiar with them that, not only have they ceased to amaze us, but we even now regard them as must have necessities of life. Please do not get me wrong, I am not saying that having a cell phone is evil. However, I do think that they serve as a powerful illustration of the manner in which we tend to flout the familiar.

This mentality can be very deadly to us as God’s people, especially as God’s people living in Carmi, Illinois, in the year 2007. We are, I believe, extremely blessed to live in this community where God’s Word is still largely recognized and where biblical truth still plays a significant role in our general worldview. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for many regions of our own nation, let

alone the world as a whole. Furthermore, we are extremely blessed to live in a country where we can freely gather together for worship—where we have the freedom to worship as our conscience dictates, as opposed to the government, for example. And as if all of that were not enough, here at this church you all are blessed with the unmitigated privilege of being led by a brilliantly talented and (if I do say so myself) ravishingly handsome Polish preacher (joke)!

Sincerely, though... Have we considered the wonderful abundance of our spiritual blessings? Do we really realize how lavishly God has poured out His grace upon us? Whereas millions of Christians around the world are pining for copies of the Bible in their own languages, you and I have Bibles in abundance—many of us probably own four or five or more in at least two or three versions. Whereas millions of Christians around the world are imprisoned, tortured, and even killed for their faith in Christ, you and I can boldly proclaim His name in the city square and worship together in public with relatively little to no persecution of any kind. Let us praise God on high for these blessings! Not only so, but let us also constantly be reminding ourselves of the caveat Jesus issues in Luke 12:48, where He says, *“From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.”* We are blessed, indeed.

However, if our passage this morning teaches us anything, I think it teaches us that, if we are not extremely vigilant, our tremendous profusion of spiritual blessings can quickly become a curse. For example, consider the people of Nazareth as seen in our verses this morning, remembering that they had known Jesus for almost His entire life on earth.

- Road trip – Travel book of thought-provoking questions:
- If you had a time machine, where and when would you most like to go?
- For me, it is not even close – I’d go see Jesus!

This dream of mine was the actual privilege of the people in Nazareth; they had an opportunity unequalled at any time in any place in all of history. They were blessed by God to see the very Son of God, our Lord, grow up! They had the unparalleled privilege of knowing Him for thirty years and interacting with Him each and every day. Can you even imagine?!

However, look how they handled this gloriously unique privilege: They flouted it! They missed it! They obviously took God's magnificent grace for granted. Rather than being appropriately amazed, they came to Christ with such a spirit of selfishness, superiority, and entitlement that they ultimately attempted to murder Him because He quoted to them obvious truths of Scripture that they didn't want to hear. Lord forbid that you and I will ever do the same! Lord forbid that we will ever flout the blessings of God that have, by our negligence, become to us as mere familiarities! Lord forbid that we will ever take God's grace for granted!

If we are to avoid these temptations that devastated the people of Nazareth that day in the temple, then you and I must never take God's graces for granted, because we are always in danger of undervaluing that which we have in abundance. As J.C. Ryle has written, "We tend to think lightly about the privilege of an open Bible, a preached Gospel, and the freedom to meet together to worship. Let us take heed to our own spirit as we use these sacred things."

What, then, shall we do about this? Well, this quote brings to bear our three main points of application this morning. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we must live lives in which we find ourselves constantly amazed by at least three amazing graces of God:

- 1.) The Bible... 2.) The Church... 3.) The Gospel.

Time will prohibit us from looking at all three of these graces today. Therefore, we will consider the first today and resume by considering the church and the Gospel next week.

Having said that, before we discuss what it means to be amazed by any of the graces of God, we need to be clear about one vital truth: We do not and must never worship any of God's graces. They are not God; they are gifts of God, and it is idolatry to worship anything other than the one triune God of the universe. So when we say that we must remain amazed by God's graces, we are most decidedly not saying that we should ever bow in worship to them. Rather, we are amazed by them because God has given these graces as divine revelations of Himself, and as we grow in amazement of God's Word, as we grow in admiration of the true church, and as we grow in awe of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, then we will inevitably and dramatically grow in our worship and service to God.

With that clarification in mind, know this morning that if we are to grow consistently as Christians, we must remain amazed by the Bible.

Let me ask you this morning: What is your mindset when you approach the Bible or when it is read aloud in church? Do you approach it as if it were any old book, perused for your own entertainment and read at your own leisure? Do you regard reading it as a difficult burden that you would rather not have to bear, saying, "I just don't have time to read it?" Do you approach with a critical spirit, grimacing through the pages, presumptuously pointing out perceived problems? Do you, as Dr. Anderson warned us against, believe that the Bible is only inspired in spots and that you are the one inspired to spot the spots?

Or, on the other hand, do you come to Scripture with reverence, awe, and a humble spirit? // Do you come to it seeking to know the God it reveals and prepared to obey what it commands? In other words, do you come to it with a constant sense of amazement? Do you come to it as did the author of Psalm 119, who wrote:

- Psalm 119:20 – *My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.*
- Psalm 119:47-48 – *I delight in your commands because I love them. I lift up my hands to your commands, which I love, and I meditate on your decrees.*
- Psalm 119:72 – *The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.*
- Psalm 119:97 – *Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long.*
- Psalm 119:111-112 – *Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.*

Even as I read the remarkable verses, I praise God for the biblically-rooted mentality present in this congregation. I praise God that many of you consistently demonstrate your proper understanding that the Bible is the inerrant, infallible, inspired Word of God. I praise God that together as a congregation we weekly come to God's Word seeking to discover its true revelation of Him so that we might rightly honor Him and grow in true worship, service, and fellowship. Let us never even begin to take this perspective for granted.

However, inasmuch as I know this appreciation is warranted, I also know that, all too often, we become all too familiar with God's Word, and as a result we become sinfully unresponsive to it. For example, I imagine that, for many of us, the Scripture passage that is read in the Sunday-morning service is often the only Scripture passage that we read all week...talk about taking God's grace for granted. I am also certain that there are many Sundays on which we hear the message preached from God's Word, we recognize in our hearts that it is true, we realize through it that God requires significant change in our lives, and yet we go on living exactly as we always have. I can scarcely imagine a more terrible way to

flout the familiar than this! Oh, friends, let us never be as the Nazarenes were on that fateful day! Let us never be sinfully stubborn and retreat into the darkness of self-rule when God convicts of truth through the light of His Word! // Let us never be so foolish so as to take God's Word for granted. Rather, let us live in submission to the Holy Spirit, and let us do so by operating in perpetual awe and admiration of God's revealed Word! Amen?!

You see, the Word of God is infinitely amazing, not only because it guides and directs us, and not only because it contains every instruction that we need for life and godliness, but, moreover, because it reveals to us our infinitely perfect Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is by Him that we are saved. It is through Him that we are redeemed and made new. It is in Him that we see the matchless love and mercy of our Father in Heaven. There is no better use of our hearts than to love Him. There is no better use of our hands than to serve Him. There is no better application of our minds than to know Him. And there is no greater way to know Christ than through the Bible, God's revealed Word.

Let me ask you, are you really amazed by God's Word? If not, it may be that you have never been amazed by the Lord and Savior it reveals. Have you come today like the people of Nazareth, with a spirit of entitlement, wondering, "What's in it for me?" Or are you truly amazed by Jesus Christ and coming to express your praise and worship to Him alone? Can you sincerely sing the famous words of the song, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saves a wretch like me?" Let us always remain amazed by God's grace!

-- Video – Are You Amazed?