

Dear friends in our Savior,

One of the big parts of the Superbowl pregame shows today are the human interest stories that they will film on the players who are playing in the game. People want to know more about who their favorite players are. So to snag viewers and keep their interest though the 4 hours or so of pre-game, they dig into the backgrounds of the players and find both good and bad. You learn where they come from, what has happened to them to make them who they are today, what they do off the field and what their goals in life are after football. These players hold a big attraction to a lot of people. People want to know who they are!

The biggest person in our minds today as we gather this morning is not playing the Superbowl this afternoon. Yet it is essentially important that we understand exactly who he is. This, of course, is Jesus our Savior. Understanding who Jesus is helps us to have the correct expectations about him. Having the correct expectations of Jesus helps us to provide comfort in times of trouble, encouragement in times of difficulty, hope as we face the problems of life and certainty when we ponder the afterlife. Understanding exactly who Jesus is helps us appreciate and treasure all the more what he has done for us through his mission here on this earth and what he continues to do for us as we travel here. We are encouraged today: **Appreciate Jesus for Who He Is.**

**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, and he began by saying, "Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 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. 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. 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. 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." All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.*

After Jesus' baptism at the Jordan River, he returned to the northern province of Galilee to begin his earthly ministry. News about him had spread over the entire countryside. As he began teaching the people about himself and revealing himself as the Messiah promised from God, he used miracles to back up his claims. Those miracles helped people to see that he was more than a mere man, more than even a great prophet. These miracles generated excitement and brought more crowds to see Jesus. But people began coming for the show rather than to listen to what Jesus was saying. This is what happened in Nazareth, the hometown where Jesus had grown up. They had heard about all the miracles that he was doing in the neighboring towns and they were excited for the hometown boy to bring his show to their town. They were hoping that he would dazzle them. That's why after he read the scripture that day in the synagogue, their eyes were intently fixed on him. But they were not ready for what he had to say to them.

It appears that Luke only records a summary of the sermon that Jesus preached that day. He tells us that people were amazed at his words of grace. Those words of grace were summarized in the thought—"Today, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The words that he had just read from Isaiah were well-known to be words that prophesied about the Messiah. Jesus was telling them—this is written about me. He perhaps developed his thoughts around this theme: "In me, all that was foretold of the Messiah has been fulfilled. You hear me speak as the Messiah who has the Spirit on him. Your ears bear witness that I am saying exactly what Isaiah prophesied. I am the long expected Savior preaching the good news of salvation to you." Perhaps these words amazed them because they had never heard this type of preaching before. So much of their religion was based on the law. Here Jesus spoke words of grace to them. He demonstrated to them the incredible love that God has for unworthy sinners in sending Jesus. He would suffer and do all that was necessary to make them acceptable to a holy God. The law they couldn't keep he would keep for them. They were amazed by these words of grace. But a Messiah who had come to seek and save the lost was not what they expected from Jesus when they gathered that day.

What do you expect of Jesus as you gather before him? What are your expectations of him as your Lord and Savior? People today in our world want many different things when it comes to their Savior. Many want a Savior that conforms to their thoughts and ideas of what he should be. They want a Savior of their own making that fits their own ideals and designs. Others want a Savior who acts like a doting grandpa that lets the kids get away with much more than their parents ever would, doesn't ever get that mad and just laughs it off when they get into trouble or do something naughty. Others want a Savior

who is there to meet every earthly need, who is at their beck and call to remove all their problems and provide them with all the comforts they could want. While many want Jesus to fit their thoughts, others refuse to accept who he reveals himself to be. Many see in Jesus a great teacher and a good example but don't want to see how he could be the Son of God who came into the world to redeem all sinners and rescue people spiritually. Understanding who Jesus is, what he came to do, and what our expectations are to be is essential so that we can be on our guard against reason and the outward appearance of things get in the way of our faith in God's gracious promises.

This is so important because like the people of Nazareth, when reality doesn't meet our expectations, doubt and eventually anger begin to creep in. As Jesus was sharing the word with this people, he could see the unbelief starting to creep in. They were on the verge of concluding that the one who spoke such gracious words and did such mighty acts must be of divine origin and be the Savior. But their reason began to take. They had not seen him do miracles when he was younger. They remember him to be the carpenter's son who worked with his dad. They needed proof to be convinced that he was who he said he was. He could read their minds. They were inwardly saying, "Physician, heal yourself." In other words, show us you can heal yourself before we'll believe that you can heal us. Jesus' words were not enough for them. They wanted him to prove his authority.

Jesus rebuked them for their unbelief. He refused to yield to their demands for proof. Instead, he cited two examples from Scripture which showed God remove his blessings from Israel because they refused to put their trust in him. There were widows in Israel at the time of Elijah. But because of Israel's unbelief, Elijah was sent to help the widow in the heathen land of Zarephath. It was the same in Elisha's time. There were plenty of people who had leprosy in Israel, but God sent his grace to Naaman from Syria. Jesus' words were enough. They were all the authority that he needed for them to believe and put their faith in him. But in their stubborn unbelief they refused. Their self-centered pride would not allow them to accept Jesus as the spiritual messiah he came to be who would rescue his people from their sins.

Jesus' rebuke of them for their unbelief made them furious. Sometimes, those who are the most guilty on the inside become the most mad on the outside. They rejected his claims to be the Messiah. They wanted to get rid of him completely. They drove him outside and in their anger at him were ready to throw him over the cliff and get rid of him once and for all. We are shocked at this violent reaction to Jesus. We stand ready to defend him and claim, "We would never do that!" Until we get down, depressed and all alone. Until things aren't going the way we wanted them to go or thought God should guide them to go. We see others who have things going well and we are ready to throw Jesus over the cliff as we cry out, "What about me? I'm the one struggling in my faith. I'm the one who has problems. Heal me! I don't care about those miracles that you performed in the lives of everyone else, I want to see what you can do in MY life! I'm tired of all the bad things happening to me. I thought I became Christian so I didn't have to face all these things—and now a dear family member has passed away, my children are out of control, I lost my job, my health stinks, I'm broke and lonely. What about me?" Perhaps that sounds familiar. We have been there too, on the verge of throwing Jesus over the cliff because we don't want to hear what he has to say or have our expectations of him all messed up.

Jesus came to this earth to be our Savior. We don't need the miracles to know that. We don't need to see the proof in visible evidence. His word has all the authority we need. Faith comes from hearing the message. The Gospel—this good news of Jesus—is the power of God that brings us to faith and sustains us in our faith. There in his word, we see the Savior Jesus came to be. He never gave in to the temptation to use his powers for his own glory. His focus was on you and me and the salvation that was needed for our sins the entire time that he was here on this earth. His mission was to make it possible for you and me to live eternally with him and he stayed mission focused his entire time on this earth. He came to wash away our sins—all those times in our selfish reason and stubborn pride we didn't want to believe what Jesus had to say. He came to pay the punishment that we deserved for doubt and uncertainty that was ready to throw him over the cliff. And he did just that! He never promised easy life on this earth. He never promised miracles to sustain us physically. But he did promise us eternal life and through his perfect life, innocent death and resurrection from the grave that is exactly what he has given to us. He has promised to go with us and sustain us through all the crosses that we must bear and sufferings that we must face on this earth. We don't need miracles to convince us of this. We have his Word through which the Holy Spirit works in our hearts.

We pray that our reaction to Jesus will be like the people in Capernaum, where Jesus went after Nazareth. They were amazed at his teaching because of its authority. They listened to and accepted his word. They rid themselves of their sinful selfish pride, threw away their sinful reason, set aside the worldly ideas about who Jesus was and through the Holy Spirit appreciated Jesus for who he was—God's only Son, the promised Messiah sent to bring salvation. Jesus again reveals to us again today exactly who he is—the one who came to proclaim peace to those captive in sin, to bring freedom from those bound by the chains of sin, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor in his grace and salvation. Rejoice in Jesus. Accept him in faith given by the Holy Spirit. And appreciate him for who he is. Amen.