

Gospels class 17—Jesus Heals a Nobleman’s son, is rejected in Nazareth

Good morning/afternoon,

Last time we left off with Jesus leaving Judea to go to Galilee, and He heads up through Samaria, stopping at the well in Shechem where He talks with the Samaritan woman. As a result of that encounter, He stays there for two days talking with the Samaritans at Shechem before continuing His journey to Galilee. Today we’ll pick up the story in

John 4:43-45—

43 Now after the two days He departed from there [Shechem] and went to Galilee.
44 For Jesus Himself testified that a prophet has no honor in his own country.
45 So when He came to Galilee, the Galileans received Him, having seen all the things He did in Jerusalem at the feast [the Passover, which John covered earlier]; for they also had gone to the feast.

They had seen the miracles He had performed in Jerusalem that we read about earlier in

John 2:23 and 3:2—

23 Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, *many believed in His name when they saw the signs [miracles] which He did.*

John 3:2 This man [Nicodemus] came to Jesus by night and said to Him, “Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; *for no one can do these signs [miracles] that You do unless God is with him.*”

Next we see again that John the baptizer is imprisoned, and this leads Jesus to go to Galilee where He preaches the gospel. We talked about this last time, that Jesus was attracting quite a following in Judea, and when John the baptizer is thrown into the dungeon of Herod Antipas He realizes the same thing may happen to Him, so He leaves Judea for Galilee.

We pick up the story reading from Matthew 4:17—

17 From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

And **Mark 1:14-15** connects this with John’s imprisonment.

14 Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God,

15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.”

In the Kingdom of God seminars we had a year or two ago we discussed the four aspects of this verse—“The time is fulfilled,” “The Kingdom of God is at hand,” “Repent,” and “Believe the Gospel.” You may wish to go back and review those sometime. It’s four aspects of the message Jesus Christ brought, and the same four aspects that the Church teaches. The important thing for us to realize is that for us, that Kingdom of God is at hand, and we have to repent and believe that good news—and believing means to *act on what we believe*. He is the King of that Kingdom, and we must accept Him as our King and Ruler now in all aspects of our lives. We are to seek that Kingdom first in our lives (Matthew 6:33) so we can be part of that Kingdom with Him. And that truly is good news, which is what the word *gospel* means.

Notice Jesus Christ's message—it's the Kingdom of God, the same message of the biblical prophets who had come before. Let's notice a few that show that the *Kingdom of God*, a literal Kingdom on Earth, was prophesied to come.

Daniel 7:13-14—

13 “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.

Daniel is seeing a vision of Jesus Christ, who called Himself the Son of Man, coming before God the Father, here called “the Ancient of Days.”

14 Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.

This is clearly a prophecy of a physical kingdom that all peoples, nations and languages will serve the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Isaiah 9:6-7—

6 For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

7 Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

This is a prophecy familiar to them of a literal kingdom and government that would rule over the earth with judgment and justice.

Isaiah 2:2-3—

2 Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.

“Mountain” in Bible prophecy is symbolic of kingdoms, empires or governments.

3 Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Again, this is a prophecy of a literal kingdom on earth ruling over all the nations, centered there in Jerusalem. So when Jesus Christ came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, this wasn't a *new* message. The prophets who had gone before preached the same message. Jesus did have a *new emphasis*, which was what we must do to *enter* that Kingdom, which we'll see as we go along, but His message was a *continuation* of what had come before as foretold by many earlier biblical prophets.

Let's now go back to **Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15**, and notice that Matthew uses “Kingdom of *Heaven*,” substituting “heaven” for “God” so as not to speak God's name. Matthew is writing primarily to a Jewish audience. The **Third Commandment** says, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...” So to avoid doing this, the Jews wouldn't use God's name at all. They wouldn't even say the word “God” either. Jesus seems to have followed the same practice. Jesus probably called it the Kingdom of

Heaven rather than the Kingdom of God for the same reason, using a synonym rather than using the word “God” or the name of God. And Matthew recorded it that way. A few times Matthew uses Kingdom of God, but usually it’s something else.

I do think Jesus regularly used synonyms in this way because the other Gospel writers also record Jesus using synonyms. Let’s notice a few of the ways the other Gospel writers record Jesus referring to God with other synonyms:

Luke 20:4—

4 “The baptism of John—was it from *heaven* or from men?”

Mark 14:62—

62 “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of *the Power*, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”

John 4:23—

23 “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship *the Father* in spirit and truth; for *the Father* is seeking such to worship Him.

So Jesus is following this practice of not using God’s name and substituting something else instead rather than saying “God.” Here we see, not just from Matthew, but from Mark, Luke and John, that He uses “heaven,” “the Power,” and “the Father” as synonyms for God. Sometimes Mark and Luke have Jesus saying “Kingdom of God,” but that’s because they’re writing to a more Roman, gentile audience in the case of Mark, and Luke is writing to a broad universal audience, so they are essentially translating and saying what Jesus *meant* rather than the actual words that He said in these cases. They needed to spell it out for their audiences, whereas Matthew knew that his Jewish audience would automatically mentally translate, knowing that these terms were referring to God.

Because people don’t understand this simple fact about the culture of that time, they think that Jesus was always talking about this heavenly kingdom that people will go to when they die, and that’s the reward of Christians. But that’s not what He meant at all. No, we die and we go to the grave, and we will later be resurrected when that Kingdom of God is established here on Earth.

The Jews understood that the Messiah would establish the Kingdom of God on Earth, so there wasn’t any debate about that—although most of them thought of the Messiah as a physical ruler who would lead the Jews to throw out the Romans and reestablish a Jewish kingdom. The idea of going to heaven after death came out of Greek mythology, not out of the Bible. No first-century Jew would’ve remotely thought Jesus was talking about going to heaven at death. That’s why it’s important to understand the culture of the day to see what he was really saying.

So back to our story flow with Luke’s account in **Luke 4:14-15—**

14 Then Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and news of Him went out through all the surrounding region.

What kind of news went out about him? Based on what we saw last time, it was news that He was a miracle-working Rabbi.

15 And He taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

We see that His reception was very positive at this point. Shortly we’ll see that it was Jesus’ custom to regularly go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. That’s what He did as part of keeping the Sabbath holy—He went to the synagogue just like any other good Jew

of His day. He didn't break the Sabbath, He kept it religiously. And as it says here, He was widely accepted at this point and welcomed when He went into the synagogues.

Now we come to the part where Jesus heals the son of a nobleman at Cana in Galilee.

Picking up the story in **John 4:46-54—**

46 So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.

This word translated “nobleman” means a royal official of the king. Who is the king for which this man is an official or officer? Look at **your map on the back of the Harmony.** This nobleman lives in Capernaum. He's in the territory of whom? Herod Antipas—the same Herod who has thrown John the baptizer in jail. Why did Herod Antipas throw John in jail? Because John criticized his marriage to his half-brother's wife, which was adultery. And as we covered last time, Jesus left Judea to go to Galilee because He was concerned the same thing might happen to Him, and He knew it wasn't time for that to happen yet.

So let's think about the implications of this for the nobleman. This nobleman probably knows that Herod Antipas, and particularly Herod's wife, is no fan of John the baptizer. And who is Jesus? Jesus is a cousin of this same John the baptizer. Further, Jesus may well be a follower of John the baptizer because He has been baptized by John. And He may be part of the same movement as John because He has His disciples out baptizing just as John was doing. So if you are a royal official of this same King Herod Antipas, to be seen as consorting with someone who is a potential threat to the king is a very dangerous position to be in. You could well end up Herod's dungeon like John the baptizer. You didn't want to get on Herod's bad side. You could end up with your head no longer attached to your shoulders.

So the stakes are quite high for this nobleman. His son is dying, but the only alternative he sees is a course of action that could possibly cost him his own life as well. His situation is desperate and he has to take desperate measures. His son will die if he doesn't do what he knows needs to be done. So he takes the risk to try to save his son.

47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Capernaum, where this official was, **is about 22 to 25 miles from Cana,** depending on how curvy the road was in that day. So he hears that Jesus has come back to Galilee from Judea and is at Cana. If you were walking, it would take about a day and a half one way to make the trip.

As he is traveling, he has lots to think about. He knows his son is at the point of death and it will take him at least a day to day and a half to get to Cana and the same amount of time to return to Capernaum. He doesn't know if his son will live that long. And he doesn't know if he can somehow convince this Rabbi to come back with him to Capernaum to heal his son. And he also has to wonder about the consequences that will happen to him if it's discovered that he is meeting with this Jesus who may be a threat to the King. So this man has a *lot* on his mind. Put yourself in his shoes and imagine how you would feel under those circumstances. You would probably feel pretty desperate and maybe even hopeless.

One minor detail to point out here is that when John's Gospel says the man implored

Jesus to “come down” and heal his son, this shows that the author knows his geography—because Capernaum is about 25 miles away and is somewhere around 2,000 feet lower at an elevation of 700 feet below sea level on the Sea of Galilee. If you’re just making this up, as Bible critics would have you believe, you wouldn’t specify that the man said to *come down*. You’d just say, “Come heal my son,” not “Come *down* and heal my son.” So this shows the writer knew his geography and the lay of the land.

So the nobleman comes to Jesus and pleads with him to come to Capernaum and heal his dying son.

48 Then Jesus said to him, “Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe.”

Who was Jesus primarily speaking to—the nobleman who has just walked to see Him for a day and a half, or the bystanders? Since we saw at the beginning of today’s study that Galileans were among those who had seen Him perform miracles at the Passover Feast in Jerusalem, presumably Jesus’ words are more directed at the bystanders than at the nobleman himself, who is just there desperately seeking Jesus’ help.

So what is His point in saying this? Jesus is rebuking the idea that *you have to see first* before you will believe. What does Jesus want among His followers? He wants those who will believe *regardless* of whether or not they actually see something like a miracle. He wants followers who will believe and take Him at His word no matter what. He wants followers with *faith*, in other words. That’s the point here.

49 The nobleman said to Him, “Sir, come down before my child dies!”

And then Jesus tells him something that he didn’t expect to hear. Because after all, his whole point in coming was to try to convince Jesus to come back with him to Capernaum to heal his son.

50 Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man *believed* the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.

So we see here the kind of attitude and faith that Jesus Christ wants to see in all who would follow Him. The man didn’t need to personally witness a miracle to believe that Jesus could heal. He believed what Jesus told him, accepted it, and he began the long journey back down to Capernaum a day and half walk away.

51 And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”

So the son has been healed, and the nobleman’s servants apparently set off toward Cana to find their master and let him know the good news, and they meet somewhere along the road between Cana and Capernaum.

52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, “Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him.”

The seventh hour was about 1 o’clock, so that tells us when the nobleman met Jesus on the previous day. We don’t know what time they meet here on the road, but it’s sometime the next day. This also tells us that the nobleman apparently was walking the whole way, because had he been on a horse or donkey he probably would’ve been back in Capernaum by this time.

53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, “Your son lives.” And he himself believed, and his whole household.

So this is quite a miracle, and what does it show? It shows that not only *can God heal*, but that *He can heal over a long distance*. About 25 miles in this case. And this has implications for us today. We are told to go to the elders of the Church for prayer and

anointing when we are sick, and we do that fairly regularly on the Sabbath.

But sometimes circumstances and distance make that impossible. And in the book of Acts we find the apostles using what we call anointed cloths to send to people for healing. And it obviously worked, as we see in Acts 19:12. So this is something we do fairly often in the Church today. And we've probably all heard stories over the years of how someone was healed as soon as he or she called a minister to request an anointed cloth. So I always keep some in my laptop bag in case one of you as a sick family member at home who needs one. It's based on what we read in the book of Acts and the example of the miracle that we see here.

54 This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.

Since John identifies this as the second miracle, the first is apparently the first one recorded by John when Jesus turned the 120 to 180 gallons of water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana.

So we see a remarkable example of believing faith in this nobleman. There's much more to the story when we consider the distance involved in the background of this man and the potential danger he faced in going to Jesus to ask help for his son. It also helps us to see that when things may seem quite hopeless for us, *God knows what is going on* and never leaves nor forsakes us. We may not get the answer we seek, and this man did, but if we don't get the answer we want that does not mean that God does not hear or that He has abandoned us. Any questions?

Now we move on to the fascinating story of what happens when Jesus speaks at the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth, where He had grown up. Here's an artist's **illustration of what Nazareth** might've looked like at that time. To understand the full depth of what is going on here, we need to understand some of the background of the town of Nazareth. Some of this we have covered before in bits and pieces, but I want to put together the picture for us to see how it affected the events recorded here.

Nazareth was a small town in Galilee of several hundred people, perhaps up to a thousand. It's not mentioned anywhere in the Bible before the Gospels, and archaeology shows that the town didn't exist before the second century B.C. As we talked about last time, the northern 10 tribes of Israel split from the other tribes and formed the kingdom of Israel. **After several centuries of evil kings and idolatry** and turning their backs on God, God had enough and the Assyrians invaded and took the Israelites away into captivity in the far **reaches of the Assyrian Empire**, after which they became known to history as the lost 10 tribes. In their place **the Assyrians moved in people** from elsewhere in the Assyrian Empire and settled them in the lands of the northern 10 tribes, including the region of Galilee.

And not long after that the same thing happened with the kingdom of Judah. They were **invaded and taken captive by the Babylonians**. The big difference is that after 70 years of captivity, the Babylonian Empire fell to the Medo-Persian Empire, and King Cyrus allowed the Jews to return back to Jerusalem and their homeland. This story is told in the biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah. But only a few of the Jews did return with them. Most stayed in Babylon where they had settled and built new lives for themselves.

Another factor is that they were now living under pagan Persian rule in Babylon, and if they moved back to the Holy Land they would still be under pagan Persian rule because the Persian Empire ruled the whole Middle East. So what would be the point of moving back?

In the 300s B.C. Alexander the Great came along and overthrew the Persian Empire. Most of the Jews were still in the land of the former Babylonian Empire, but now it's part of the pagan Greek empire—as is the Holy Land. Again, there's no real incentive to move back. But then, in 167 B.C., a transforming event takes place in the Holy Land. Something called **the Maccabean revolt** takes place among the Jews there, and they throw off Antiochus Epiphanes who at this time was ruling them and they gain their independence for the first time in centuries.

Now things are different. Now there are Jewish kings in charge of the lands that had been the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And from Bible prophecy the people know that the time of the appearance of the Messiah is drawing near. So in the 150-100 B.C. time frame there is a **large migration into Galilee** of religious Jews who knew from prophecy that the Messiah would appear in Galilee and they wanted to be there to reclaim Galilee from the pagans who had settled there after the Assyrians had taken the Israelites away into captivity after the fall of Samaria that we talked about last time. Those from the areas of the former Babylonian Empire are joined by other Jews from towns in Judea like Bethlehem and Hebron. And they found all of these town that we read about in the Gospels—towns like Nazareth, Capernaum, Bethsaida, Magdala, Chorazin and others.

They knew from prophecy that the Messiah would appear in Galilee as they read in **Isaiah 9:1-2**—

1 Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed, as when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles.

Nazareth, incidentally, is in the tribal allotment of Zebulun and Capernaum is in the territory of Naphtali. Why is it called “Galilee of the gentiles”? Because the Assyrians had moved these gentiles in after they moved the Israelites out.

2 The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.

And they correctly concluded that this prophecy of a “great light” shining in Galilee was a prophecy of the Messiah—and indeed it was. So these religious Jews migrated to Galilee and **founded towns like Nazareth** in this land that was otherwise occupied by pagans. They wanted to reclaim this land for Israel and to be there when the Messiah showed up!

All of this takes place in the period of time between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the Gospels, so it's not written in the Bible. But this does set the stage for the Gospels and Jesus growing up in Nazareth and beginning His ministry in Galilee. So this was the atmosphere in which Jesus grew up in Nazareth. He grew up in a very religious atmosphere where people *expected* the Messiah. And this is why we see two things in particular throughout Christ's ministry. We see a lot of fervor among people expecting a Messiah, and we see Jesus encountering and sometimes butting heads with a lot of very religious people like the Pharisees, with whom we see quite a bit of conflict.

These really religious people Jesus encounters often are here in Galilee, not in Jerusalem as we might expect.

So it's somewhat ironic that Jesus, the Messiah, grew up in a town of messianic zealots who were expecting the Messiah. So with that background, let's continue the story in

Luke 4:16-31—

16 So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.

First, notice that it was Jesus' custom to regularly go to the synagogue on the Sabbath. He didn't break the Sabbath, He kept it religiously and went to the synagogue just like any other good Jew of His day. And when we understand who Jesus really was, that He was the Creator God who actually revealed the Ten Commandments and the law to Moses and Israel, it makes it all the more absurd to think that He came to do away with that same law. Jesus kept the Sabbath because He was God, not because He was Jewish.

Notice also that He **“stood up to read.”** This is describing exactly what we know of synagogue services at that time. The individual would stand up to read, and sit to teach or comment. **This is a photo of a restored synagogue** at Nazareth with some actors dressed in appropriate period clothing showing what a synagogue service would've looked like. Luke says “book,” but it's actually a scroll. Books wouldn't be invented for several more decades. It's talking about a scroll made of animal skin. The different books of the Bible were written on different scrolls, so the synagogue would have a number of different scrolls for the different books of their Bible.

17 And He was handed the book [scroll] of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written:

18 “The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, [and this is a *remez* back to His baptism when the Spirit of God descended onto Him like a dove, which we talked about when we covered that section] because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed;

19 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

Now let's turn over to Isaiah 61 and see what Jesus did and didn't read. Isaiah 61 was one of the favorite passages for these religious Jews of Galilee and they were very familiar with it. Notice what it says in **Isaiah 61—**

1 “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, [This is a messianic passage, and everyone there knows it] because the LORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD,

Jesus stops there and doesn't read the rest of this passage from Isaiah. But let's notice what it says and why this was so important to the Jews of Galilee.

and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn,

3 To console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”

And here's the part that really struck a chord with the Galilean Jews:

4 And they shall rebuild the old ruins, they shall raise up the former desolations, and

they shall repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations.

And the Jews of Galilee loved this part because that's what they saw themselves as doing—they've moved to Galilee to reclaim this land for Israel, to rebuild the old ruins that were formerly part of the kingdom of Israel, so they can be on top where they ought to be. And they really loved the next part of Isaiah's prophecy too:

5 Strangers [the word means "nations" and is often translated "gentiles"] *shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the foreigners* [gentiles] *shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers.*

The way the Jews of Galilee read this, the gentiles would be serving them, feeding the flocks and herds of the Jews' animals, and the gentiles would be working in the fields for the Jews and everything would be as it should be.

6 But you [the Jews, as they saw themselves in this prophecy] *shall be named the priests of the LORD, they shall call you the servants of our God. You shall eat the riches of the Gentiles, and in their glory you shall boast.*

So the Jews of Galilee loved this prophecy because it foretold that they would at last be on top of these nasty gentiles, and now they could oppress the Romans and the other gentiles as the gentiles had oppressed them all of these years. This is what the people there in the synagogue expected Jesus to read, since this is one of their favorite passages. They knew that the Messiah was coming to establish a Jewish kingdom and then they would be in charge rather than these nasty gentiles.

But rather than reading their favorite part, **Jesus stops halfway through the second verse — "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord."** Looking at it from our perspective today, we know why He stopped there. We understand that in His first coming Jesus would fulfill only the parts of the prophecy that He read. He wouldn't fulfill the remainder until His second coming in glory and power to fulfill this and many other prophecies.

But they don't know that. They see Jesus clearly claiming to fulfill several well-known messianic prophecies—meaning He's claiming to be the Messiah right then and there—and then He stops just before He gets to what they consider to be the really good part. So the atmosphere in this synagogue in Nazareth has to be absolutely electric at this point. They wanted to know, why did He stop? And what's He going to say or do next? What's going on here?

20 Then He closed the book [scroll], **and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him.**

I think we're beginning to see now that every word in the Gospels is important. This says He **"sat down"** and **"the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him."**

At the front of every synagogue was a large chair called the **Moses seat**. Here's a photograph of one from the synagogue at Chorazin, about three miles uphill from Capernaum. They have found these with Hebrew inscriptions on them that literally say, **"Moses' seat."** You may remember Jesus saying: **"the scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses seat. Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.**

This is what is being referred to here. And when a Rabbi wanted to make a binding instruction or announcement to his audience, he would make that statement from the Moses seat. The significance of this is that he was sitting in the place of Moses, and as

Moses was Israel's greatest lawgiver, so the person sitting in the Moses seat was giving a binding instruction to the people. We can't absolutely prove this is what Jesus is doing, but it certainly seems to fit the circumstances and the culture. This would also explain why Luke notes that **"the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him."** He's about to say something authoritative and they are hanging on every word.

21 And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." He has just said, in no uncertain terms, that He is the Messiah. And speaking from Moses' seat, they are bound by that.

22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, "Is this not Joseph's son?"

This tells us that they "marveled" or "wondered" (as it could be translated) or were puzzled by what He said. His words were gracious, but that doesn't necessarily mean the audience thought His words were gracious. They're wondering, "Who is this guy whom we know is Joseph's son who grew up right down the street from here? Who does He think He is?" And as we'll see, they get very angry very quickly at what He says.

23 He said to them, "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'"

He knew that they had heard of the miracles He had done, probably including the one of the nobleman's son that we just covered. But He also knew how they felt about Him in their hearts.

24 Then He said, "Assuredly, I say to you, no prophet is accepted in his own country."

Who are the people He's talking to in the synagogue this day? He is saying this to His relatives, family, friends and community. He knew they wouldn't believe in Him because they were too familiar with Him. He'd grown up there in Nazareth. They knew Him since He was a little kid. There's no way this kid they'd seen grow up among them was the Messiah! There's the old saying, "Familiarity breeds contempt." And this is what's going on here. They were familiar with Him, and wouldn't accept who He really was and claimed to be.

And then He says something that really sets off this group of very religious Jews who are convinced that they are the chosen people of God.

25 "But I tell you truly, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a great famine throughout all the land;

26 "but to none of them was Elijah sent except to Zarephath, in the region of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."

You can read about that in **1 Kings 17**, where Elijah stayed with this widow and her son during this period of famine and God sustained them on the little bit of oil and flour that she had. But the key to this is where this took place. This was in Lebanon, near Sidon, in what was *gentile* country. This woman wasn't an Israelite, but a *gentile* that God sent Elijah to in this period of famine and God sustained this *gentile* woman and her son. So there's one example of God's mercy toward gentiles, but He gives a second example—a second *witness*, if you will, of God showing mercy to gentiles and accepting them, too. There are two witnesses.

27 "And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."

You can read about this in **2 Kings 5**. Naaman was a Syrian general, commander of the

Syrian army, sworn enemies of the Israelites. But he had leprosy. And Elisha told him to go wash in the Jordan River seven times, and he was healed. Jesus' point here is that even Elijah and Elisha, two of God's greatest prophets, weren't accepted in their own country, but God used them to show mercy and kindness to a gentile widow and a gentile general. So Jesus gives "two witnesses"—Elijah and Elisha—of God's mercy toward gentiles, right out of their Scriptures. And they can't deny it, because it's right out of the Bible. So this infuriates the people, because *they* are the chosen ones, not those filthy, good-for-nothing gentiles!

So Jesus has not only claimed to be fulfilling the messianic prophecies—and thus proclaiming that He *is* the Messiah—but He also emphasized that God's mercy includes the despised gentiles. And they themselves have come to Galilee to push out the despised gentiles. And their reaction is immediate. What happens next when they hear these words?

28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,

29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.

So here is His real homecoming. [Here's a photo of a cliff outside Nazareth](#) that's the traditional spot where this is thought to have happened. But there's more to the story here than them just wanting to throw Him over a cliff. They were planning to *stone* Him, which required the person to be thrown from a height to stun and possibly kill the person.

Jewish law spelled out how a person was to be stoned. It wasn't something that was just done in a haphazard manner. There were specific rules to be followed. The first was that a person being stoned had to be brought to the edge of a cliff that was at least 12 cubits high—or about 18 feet, the height of a two-story building. If there wasn't a cliff nearby, the person could be taken to the top of a city wall or a building instead. There the two witnesses against the person would push him off and he would fall to the ground, and the fall alone might kill him or it would at least stun or badly injure the person.

What do we see here that they planned to do with Jesus? **"They led him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw him down over the cliff."** This was the first step for stoning a person. After the condemned person was thrown from the cliff, every person who thought he was guilty would throw one stone at him. Many would pick up the heaviest stone they could lift and drop it on the condemned person. If a dozen people thought he was guilty, he would be hit with a dozen stones. If a hundred people thought he was guilty, he would be hit with a hundred stones. If 200 thought he was guilty, 200 stones would be dropped or thrown.

Of course, this was usually fatal because putting the person to death was the whole point. And that's what they intended to do to Jesus. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah, He said a prophet is without honor in his own country and among his own people, and He told them that God is merciful to the gentiles and He does and will work through the gentiles whom they despised. And for this they wanted to stone Him. But it didn't get quite that far.

30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

So what happened here? I think most likely some sort of miracle took place here that spared Jesus' life. Luke doesn't explain it. I wonder if it was something like what happened in Sodom, when the angels were visiting Lot and they struck the men of the

city with blindness so they could escape. Maybe God sent some sort of sudden windstorm that temporarily blinded and confuse them, and Jesus was able to pass through the middle of them like we read here. We just don't know because we're not given the details. But you don't go from a crowd determined to toss Jesus off a cliff to a crowd passively letting Him walk away through the middle of them without something miraculous taking place. It's not His time yet, so he isn't stoned at this point.

31 Then He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and was teaching them on the Sabbaths.

Capernaum then becomes His base of operations. Why Capernaum? There are very good reasons, and we'll talk about that next time.

Any questions? If not, we'll wrap it up here for today.