
Luke 4:16-32. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. ¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: ¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰ 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

Christ overcomes obstacles so that the gospel may be proclaimed.

- 1. He is undeterred in his mission to save us.**
- 2. He lifts us up to see opportunities.**
- 3. He walks with us as we seek to share the gospel.**

He walked right through the crowd and went on his way for he had work to do. He had come to proclaim the gospel. He preached that good news in Nazareth, but they did not receive it, so he went to another town. In that small town of his upbringing, Jesus made it clear that he would overcome any obstacle to proclaim and accomplish his message of salvation. The gospel would be shared, the good news that sets men and women free from sin and death and hell, *had to be* proclaimed.

Imagine that scene: an angry mob approached a cliff, driving Jesus ahead until he seemed to be stuck in this impossible situation. And then just like that, he was gone, off to preach the good news somewhere else.

It is astounding how quickly this all seems to happen. It is a bit unsettling as well. One moment Jesus is reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. The next he is being run out of town. As Jesus sits down to teach in the synagogue of Nazareth, he speaks those powerful words, ***“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*** This wasn’t a small statement. He was staking his claim as the Messiah.

They listened to him and were amazed, they even spoke well of him and the grace filled words that came from his lips. There was no denying his ability as he taught with authority, but there was this one thing that kept them from truly listening and believing. There was this one thing that they were hung up on and couldn't get past. ***"Isn't this Joseph's son?"*** This was the small town kid from this small town of Nazareth. This was Joseph and Mary's son. How could he really be the Messiah? He needed to go above and beyond and prove himself to them, as the proverb implied, ***"Physician heal yourself!"*** But even if Jesus would perform miracle after miracle many would never really receive him as Savior because they could get past that one thing, ***"Isn't this Joseph's son?"*** And when Jesus addressed this issue their amazement would so quickly turn into disappointment and then anger ultimately spiraling down all the way to a murderous rage. So, they crowded around him, led him to the brow of the hill at the edge of the city and got ready to dispose of him, but then Jesus, well, he simply walked right through their midst. Despite the pressures that he was facing he was undeterred in his mission to save. He was undeterred in his mission to proclaim the gospel.

It is astounding and rather unsettling how quickly and completely they turned on Jesus, and unfortunately that is something with which people in our world can relate. For one reason or another many in our world, many people in our communities, have driven Jesus out of their lives. Some drive him away because his message of grace or the fact that he is true God and true man simply offends their sense of reason. Some drive him away because his message seems to exclusive. Some push him away or force him out of their lives because of Jesus says some things that people just don't want to hear. Jesus has things to say about honoring marriage, or honoring the gift of life, and following God's will, and what he says sometimes doesn't sit well with a lot of folks. Some have a bad experience with a certain church and so people might get together and gang up to not only shut out a particular church, but Christ and his message all together. Entire families, entire communities, push him out of their lives for one reason or another.

And yet God in his goodness still reaches out with this grace. He still reaches out with his powerful gospel. Through his powerful word, through ministers of his grace, and through faithful Christians he continues to stand among us to proclaim his saving message or grace. There are challenges of sharing the gospel anywhere and those challenges can in certain ways be magnified in a small-town setting, but the Savior is with his people and Jesus gives his people the power to overcome obstacles so that the gospel may be proclaimed.

Several years back the congregations that I serve participated in a member survey. It included a number of pretty basic ministry survey type questions. What are some of the things you like about your church? What are some of the strengths of the congregation? What are some of the challenges? One of the questions included in the survey asked members to identify opportunities for gospel ministry in our community. As I flipped through the surveys there was one answer that I came across that I don't think I will ever fully forget. The answer submitted simply stated, "There are no opportunities." In a small town that through the years had experienced a severe drop in population, in a congregation that was prone to declining membership and declining financial support, it was easy for that person to be so focused on the crowd of challenges that were pressing in on the church that this person could not see any opportunities to share the gospel with others and to grow. Perhaps this member had little hope that his or her congregation even had any opportunities to survive as a number of other small town churches in the region had closed.

Since that survey our efforts to reach out to our small-town community have been blessed by God in an almost exponential way. The LORD has guided his people through a midst of challenges and has lifted us up to see past those challenges so that we may see the opportunities that surround us. God in his grace and in his power has also led us to act on these opportunities as well. For nearly ten years now, the four congregations in our area team up to hold a soccer bible camp, the number of children that we minister to during that week has nearly doubled since our first year. Last year nearly 110 children heard about salvation *In Christ Alone*. The children even learned and sang the beautiful hymn that bears that title (In Christ Alone – CWS # 752). God has also blessed our congregations with the opportunity to embark on a rather ambitious outreach project, as two years ago our four area WELS congregations put together plans to establish and run an Early Childhood Learning Center. When Little Lambs opened in September of 2014, eight children were in our care, currently we serve nearly 50 children every day. Through this growing ministry, we are able to reach out to a number of families throughout our small-town communities; families that we would have likely never come into contact with if we did not open the center. Despite the ongoing challenges, God in his grace has led his people to do some great things and reach out to new people with his gospel of salvation. By the grace of God, congregations who have seen their own fair share of challenges, have been able to offer a much-needed service to our community, build relationships within multiple communities, and share the love of Jesus and his saving gospel on a daily basis with many precious little lambs and their families. In the process God's people have been lifted up to see past the challenges to gospel ministry and God has started to open their eyes to see a seemingly a whole new world of opportunities to share the gospel with the members of our community.

Recently our congregations we able to rejoice that two children from the learning center were brought to the saving waters of baptism. And this past weekend a mother reached out to me about taking classes to learn more about her Savior and God-willing become a member of our congregation. Praise be to God!

There will be always be challenges. Wherever we are in this world, no matter the size of the community in which you and I live, there will always be obstacles to work of the gospel. Our own doubts, our own fears, our own unwillingness to trust and serve God like we ought will be included in those obstacles. But dear Christian, this is the kind of Savior that we have. Look at the one who puts his name on us and calls us to follow him. Look at Jesus who promises to walk with us. The crowds got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the cliff to get rid of him, and despite all the pressure, despite all the challenges, Jesus,... well, he just walked right through them. This is the kind of Savior that we have. When discouraged in our efforts and in our opportunities to share the gospel whether on a congregational level or an individual level we are reminded of his gracious power, we are reminded of his relentless love that led him to walk right through that crowd. He would not be deterred in proclaiming the gospel. It was what he came to do. There was precious souls to be reached and saved with the good news that comes through him. It was the mission that the Scriptures had foretold. It was the mission he came to fulfill. ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”***

While Jesus walked this earth, he worked tirelessly to share that message. He went back

and forth from modest size towns to tiny villages to the big city of Jerusalem in order to boldly share this wonderful message: the message of salvation, the message of sins forgiven, the message of peace with God through a Savior that God himself had sent. Jesus walked through that crowd standing on that hill in Nazareth for he was determined to meet and share the gospel with sinners who were lost and hurting in their sin and needed this saving message. And most of all he walked through that crowd standing near that cliff outside of Nazareth because it was the not the hill he came to die on.

A time would come when the crowds would not be separated. A time would come when there would be no miraculous escape. A time would come when he would relent and he would give himself over to death for us. For on a hill outside of Jerusalem he would die for the sins of the world. On that hill called Golgotha he would fulfill the message that he proclaimed. On that hill, he would set free once and for all those who were oppressed by sin and Satan, by death and hell. Until that day he had to proclaim the message. He had to reach out with the love of God. He had to help and heal and save, and so he walked through that crowd gathered by a cliff outside of Nazareth. He walked down that hill and through that crowd and continued on to the next town in order to preach and to teach. He would go on to point out sin and he would bring and apply God's grace to many, many more precious souls. He would go on to train his disciples so that they would proclaim this good news on to the next generation!

What a scene this must have been. The crowd was ready to throw him off the cliff and he walks right on through because there was more people to preach and teach to, more people to reach out to and save with the good news of the gospel. What a scene it is when we consider how it is that faith made it into your heart and mine. What a miracle it is that in his love and faithfulness the LORD reaches into our cold stubborn hearts and creates saving faith that believes in Jesus as our Savior. What marvelous things God continues to bring about among his believers wherever the gospel is being proclaimed. What a scene it is when he takes a lost and condemned creature and makes this child his own son or daughter through water and the word. Sinners, who naturally resist his Word, are connected to him by grace through faith in Jesus our Savior. Sinners, from big cities and small towns, rescued from the deadly cliffs of unbelief and the fiery pit of hell and now by the power of his saving word are held in the loving arms of God.

This is the kind of Savior that we have! He is the Savior that came down to this earth to proclaim the good news that binds up our broken hearts. He is the one who walks through the hostile crowd to preach and to teach. He is the one who walks with us. He is relentless in his mission to save us. He is your Savior who walked into your life and blessed you with the good news of sins forgiven and eternal life. Our Savior through his gift of faith now walks with us, his church on earth, and gives us his Holy Spirit so that he may lift us up to see past the challenges as he sets our gaze upon opportunities to share his Word of truth with those in our community and beyond. May this word of Jesus, this amazing message of salvation. May it never pass away from us because of pride or unbelief, but let us instead rejoice in the powerful Gospel of Jesus! And let us today be renewed once more in our Savior's mission to share God saving Word with the world, starting with those around us. Amen.