

WHEN WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH – LUKE 4:20-32

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ FEBRUARY 3, 2013

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 to them, “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.



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

There’s been a lot of talk that has been going on in these last two weeks. The talk that I’m talking about is all the hype that is surrounding Superbowl XLVII between the San Francisco 49ers and the Baltimore Ravens. For the last two weeks we’ve heard from the coaches, we’ve heard from the players, we’ve heard from the analysts, we’ve heard from the fans. That has been a lot of talk. But WORDS WON’T BE ENOUGH to win the Superbowl. That will be decided at 4:30 this afternoon, when all those words will be set aside, and there will be two teams battling it out to be called Superbowl champion. WORDS WILL NOT BE ENOUGH to win the Superbowl.

While words are not enough to win a Superbowl, God’s Word is different. God’s words are enough for us to believe. But that isn’t always the case. After Jesus had risen from the dead, a miracle of miracles, he appeared to ten of his disciples in a locked room. But one of the disciples, Thomas, was not with them. When the other disciples told Thomas, he didn’t believe them, to him WORDS WERE NOT ENOUGH, he needed to see. When Thomas did see his Savior the next week, Jesus’ words to him were these, “**Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.**” The disciples’ words should have been enough for Thomas, but they weren’t.

This morning, we see another instance WHEN WORDS WEREN’T ENOUGH. WORDS WEREN’T ENOUGH for Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. Jesus had just finished his amazing sermon, but the crowds weren’t satisfied. They were looking for more. What a sad thing it is when people didn’t trust the words that were coming out of the Son of Man. It is not just a sad thing that happened on occasion in the Bible, it’s something that happens today as well. WHEN WORDS AREN’T ENOUGH

This event happened right on the heels of what we heard about last week in our gospel reading. Here is a reminder of what happened. Jesus had been travelling throughout Israel after he was baptized by John. He was preaching and performing miracles, miracles like turning water into wine. And now Jesus had returned to his hometown of Nazareth, where, as you would expect, he received a warm welcome. Everyone was excited to see him. They even invited him to preach at their synagogue one Sabbath. The words he read were from the prophet Isaiah. Words that described the work of the Messiah coming to save his people. It was about these words that Jesus said, **“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

The crowd recognized Jesus as a great orator, he had captured the crowd’s attention with his message and the authority with which he gave it. **“All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words.”** But there was more to it than Luke is letting on. They began to think a little bit of who this exactly was. **“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”** But this was meant as no compliment, but more of an insult. They had seen Jesus grow up from a little boy to a young man. They perhaps had furniture made by him, they were perhaps his friends. And now Jesus was before them proclaiming to be the Messiah. Had Jesus said anything else, they might have believed him, but they could not believe he was the one person God promised from the beginning of the world to save mankind. He was just one of them. Jesus’ WORDS WERE NOT ENOUGH, even though they should have been.

They wanted some kind of proof. WORDS WERE NOT ENOUGH for some people. **“Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.”** They heard about the miracles Jesus had performed. If those other people were good enough to see Jesus’ miracles, then certainly Jesus should do it in his hometown, these were his ‘homies.’ WORDS WERE NOT ENOUGH, they wanted Jesus to perform some miracles.

Now, we might think that since Jesus was such a loving and caring guy that he would perform a few miracles for them, like a magician doing a few tricks. But Jesus did not do this, that was because he did not perform miracles to get people to believe, he used them to confirm their belief. Many of the crowd in Nazareth didn’t believe in the words that Jesus spoke. He proved to be the Messiah with his words, but they wanted more. You might say Jesus showed his love and his care by not giving them a miracle they weren’t ready for.

Instead of giving them a miracle, he reminded them of two stories that took place in the land of Israel. The story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath we heard in our 1st Lesson for this morning. God’s power was shown in a famine over the land of Israel for 3 ½ years. God miraculously provided for his prophet Elijah by sending him to a widow. As long as Elijah was with this widow, the jars of oil and flour did not run out. But this widow was not a Jew, she was (to the Israelites) one of the heathen. The second story was from 2 Kings 5 where Naaman, another heathen, was healed of his leprosy by the prophet Elisha.

Now, what point was Jesus making with each of these accounts? In both stories, God’s grace is shown to someone unexpected. The people of Israel, the Jews, were God’s chosen people. Chosen from the time of Abraham. Since they were chosen, they thought that God would continue to choose them, to show them favoritism with his grace, his undeserved love. But this was not the case. Even though the Jews were the nation through whom the Messiah would come, God did not stop showing his favor to others as well. These two stories are prime examples of it. So here, Jesus did not show ‘favoritism’ to his

hometown by giving them a miracle. A miracle that in all likelihood would not have changed their minds about him being the Messiah.

And since WORDS WERE NOT ENOUGH for some people, they got angry. They were furious at God's grace. So furious that they grabbed Jesus by the cloak and dragged him outside the city, up to the brow of a hill and they were going to throw him off. "See what comes of his messianic claims after we kill him!" some might have thought. We might think how a group of worshipers could turn so violent after so little time. I can't explain it, other than the sinful nature has a powerful pull on people's hearts. Now I've never heard about a group of worshipers turning violent so quickly, but does that mean we are any less furious at God's grace? Does that mean we are any less guilty of wanting to throw Jesus off that cliff?

In many ways we are similar to the Jews who were sitting in the synagogue in Nazareth. We have come to faithfully worship our God. We have come with seemingly good motives. We have been chosen by God as his holy people. God has shown favor to us. But God has told us something we don't like to hear, so we want to throw him off a cliff. "Wait, wait, wait! Are you really comparing us to that angry mob 2,000 years ago, pastor?" Yes, yes I am. What was the sin of the angry mob that wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff? It was that Jesus' WORDS WEREN'T ENOUGH. The word of God which he spoke told them something they didn't want to believe, they didn't want to accept.

And I have to confess, I have found myself at the brow of that hill on more than one occasion. When I have been furious with God's grace. Furious that my classmates were given more people skills, better studying skills, more financial aid. Angry that I look around me at all those with more gifts here – both financial gifts and intellectual gifts. I have found God's grace confusing when you look at other churches that pack them in. Perhaps you have found yourself at that hill outside of Nazareth too.

And there have been times when God's WORDS WEREN'T ENOUGH. It is because in God's Word he tells us something that we don't want to hear. Outside of God's Word we like to think that we're pretty good people, sure we make a few mistakes but we're overall good people, people deserving of God's love, man's respect, of heaven (if there indeed is one). But God's Word reveals us for who we are. It reveals us for the no good, rotten sinners that we are. Here are just a few of the Bible passages that describe our condition: **"There is no one righteous, not even one"** **"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags."** **"We all like sheep have gone astray, each of us as turned to our own way."** **"If we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."** It is this way because of sin living inside of us, even Christians. This sin goes beyond the things that we do and the things that we think. It is what is bound to us. **"The sinful mind is hostile to God, it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so"** God's WORD WASN'T ENOUGH for us. We didn't even want a part of God's Word.

So really, we aren't any different than that crowd that wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff. For by nature we didn't want him. And we were satisfied that way. But not God. God couldn't live that way. Jesus did perform a miracle that day. He showed that he was true God. He said, "Not today. This is not the hill I want to die on." God's plan was to have him die at another time, on another hill, in another way. To restore us from our fallen state. To bring us back from the dead. To make us one with God. It was this reason that Christ came, and it was this reason that Christ did not die that day outside of Nazareth.

And we are only saved when we believe. But we aren't even the reason for the belief. Jesus said, **"I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the spirit."**

Just as we didn't choose to be born physically, we can't choose to be born spiritually. It happens, when the Holy *Spirit* enters our heart with saving faith. **"You did not choose me, but I chose you"** God says. It stands to reason then, if God makes some people believe, he makes other people not believe. That may be logical, but it is not Scriptural. But nowhere in the Bible does he say that. This is one of the great mysteries of Scripture. If we believe, it is because of God, if we don't believe, it's our own fault.

And so you have it. The people at Nazareth rejected the words of the Savior. His WORDS WEREN'T ENOUGH. But after Jesus left Nazareth he went down to Capernaum and began to teach people there. **"They were amazed at his teaching because his message had authority."** His WORDS WERE ENOUGH for others. He showered his grace on the unexpected.

We can thank God that he showers his grace on the unexpected. Many people will say, "God's not fair" with a whining, complaining tone. But we should actually thank God that he isn't fair. If God were fair, he shouldn't care about any of us. We have done nothing to please him, we have done nothing to deserve his love, we have done nothing to deserve heaven, and it's all our fault. But God isn't fair, he does love us, even though we don't deserve it. And it isn't fair that God has chosen me to be his very own child. That much I know. But I thank God that he isn't fair. And I want to tell everyone else about the unfairness of our God. Amen!