

George K  
Seeing Jesus,  
Missing Salvation  
Luke 4: 14 - 30



I reckon most of us assume if we had been there in the synagogue and heard Jesus' voice and seen his face, we would have believed. We imagine that faith was easy back then. He's there in front of us opening the scriptures. Jesus preaches one of the most hopeful sermons ever given. He announces good news for the poor, freedom for captives, sight for the blind and declares the arrival of the 'year of the Lord's favour'. But by the end of the service those who marvelled at his gracious words were dragging him out to murder him by throwing him off a cliff. It is possible to see Jesus clearly, hear his voice accurately, praise him sincerely and yet miss salvation entirely. The question is not whether we admire Jesus but whether we will receive him on his terms rather than our own. When God's agenda collides with our own our praise often becomes lip-service so that what we see in the people of Nazareth is seen in our own hearts. Let us start to be brutally honest with ourselves today.

**The Year of the Lord's Favour:** After his baptism and temptation Jesus returns to his local area, Galilee, 'in the power of the Spirit'. He is going about faithfully, teaching from synagogue to synagogue, town to town and market-place to market-place. In Nazareth he opens the scroll in Isaiah 61 and reads, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour". Then as was the custom he sat down to teach and "the eyes of everyone were fastened on him" waiting to see what he would say. He does not disappoint. "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing"; 'It is happening right now through me' Salvation is no longer a promise on a page or distant. The year of the Lord's favour has a human face and it is the face of Jesus. Isaiah is not writing abstract poetry he is writing promises forged in suffering that has taken generations to fulfil. They speak of freedom, restoration, healing and divine favour. Hearts like ours do not deserve this. It is all by grace. And yet 'How can hearts like ours ever deserve this and still reject it?' The people marvel at his words but they do not grasp his claim. It becomes clear that all their praise is merely lip-service. Paul writes, "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved". (Rom 10:9) They were declaring with their mouths but they were not believing in their hearts. The real truth is that all our fervent praise will fall short of the rightful praise of the Son of God. Our hope cannot be in our praise, only in the one we praise.

**The Rejection of Jesus:** The resistance begins. Jesus is a local lad, the son of Joseph. They are overly familiar, they feel comfortable with knowing him but they don't know him well enough to submit. How many of us drift off as we read this well-known passage? How many read our Bibles at home because that is what we do and not because we want to encounter Jesus? Familiarity is not a haemorrhage, it is a slow puncture. Let's ask God to re-excite us for his Son. These people want miracles for themselves so they can bask in the local boy's fame. They want the Messiah to belong to them under their control. One of the clearest signs that we are resisting Jesus is quiet disappointment when he doesn't act as we expect or to our timetable. When prayers

have turned to accusations or trust to entitlement it's a sign that we want to manage grace. Let the Bible and the Holy Spirit help you to see yourself honestly and from that place of recognition of your sin, run to Christ desperately casting yourself on him. Jesus reminds the people of Nazareth that when Israel was far from God he sent two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, not to Israel but to the Gentiles, the Syrian Naaman, and the widow of Zarephath where Jew and Gentile were saved together. Fellowship between Jew and Gentile would come through Christ, grace is not confined just the people of Nazareth. God's grace is far larger than Nazareth, Ebenezer or your personal ministry. There is no nepotism in the reign of God. God's grace is for you, rejoice in it, give thanks for it, but remember that it is not for you alone. Grace that is no longer exclusive feels like theft. Mercy that crosses boundaries feels unfair because God who refuses to be controlled threatens our sense of privilege. To be honest, when God's agenda crosses ours, our praise is revealed as lip-service. Nazareth did not want a saviour for sinners, they wanted a servant for their agenda. This is not lack of information it is selfish unbelief. That is the way of religion but grace does not work that way. Religion is all about what I have done for God. What I have done to advance the kingdom of Heaven. Grace is Jesus, Jesus, Jesus and what he has done for me. Religion is exhausting work. Grace is that Jesus has done it all. This is the battle of the human heart. We love Jesus when he comforts us. We resist Jesus when he confronts us. We praise Jesus when he serves our plans. We reject Jesus when he exposes our idols.

**The Brow of the Hill:** They drove Jesus to the edge of the cliff to kill him, "But passing through their midst he went on his way," Jesus' hour had not yet come. Rejection does not derail redemption. Hatred does not halt God's plan. These people are church-going, hand-shaking, hymn-singing people but when grace confronted their pride they tried to kill him. This is what the human heart does to unmanageable grace. A few years later Jesus was taken up another hill where there was a furious crowd too and the rejection of grace. This time Jesus does not pass through them, he chooses to stay. This is no murder; it is a willing sacrifice. The people of Nazareth tried to kill Jesus because he would not serve their agenda. At Calvary Jesus chose to serve God's agenda: to save sinners who resist him. This is the heart of the gospel. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom 5:8)

We do not come as admirers who got it right, with pure motives or flawless praise or having never resisted him. We come as enemies who are loved anyway. We come because Jesus in Luke 4 is the same Jesus who walked through death for us, while we were still sinners. Nazareth saw Jesus and missed salvation. They heard grace and rejected the Giver. Salvation does not rest on our ability to receive Jesus correctly but on his determination to give himself fully. We come to the communion table dependant on him. The bread tells us his body was broken. The cup tells us his blood was poured out for those he welcomes while they were enemies, those who need him, those he appointed from before time, those he chose in his grace and drew to himself. Those who call upon him as Lord and say, "Lord, you are my King. Whatever you say I will do. When your agenda crosses mine help me to praise you".

The good news is this: the year of the Lord's favour is now because Christ walked through death so that sinners like us might walk into life. Jesus said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing". Let us repent today because there might not be a tomorrow