

Hearing the Saviour

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[0 : 00] We're going to turn now to our Bible reading for this morning, which you'll find in Luke's Gospel at Chapter 4. And in our Church Bibles, that is page 859.

We're continuing our new studies in Luke's Gospel, where we've been for the last few weeks. And after the first two chapters, which are like an overture, really, for the whole of the Gospel, summing it up, introducing some of the key themes about the arrival of the Savior in the world, chapters 3 and 4 particularly are marking the public announcement of the Lord Jesus Christ and his ministry in the world.

We saw last time in Chapter 3, in the first part of Chapter 4, that Luke is asking us to see the salvation of God as we see Jesus Christ himself, the one who brings light.

And here now, from verse 14 to the end of Chapter 4, I think you'll notice that there's a particular emphasis on hearing, hearing the powerful words of the Savior.

So Luke 4, verse 14. And Jesus returned, that is from his temptation in the wilderness. He returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee.

[1 : 20] And a report about him went out through all the surrounding country, and he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all. And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up.

And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day. And he stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim the good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

He rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

And all spoke, well, perhaps better, all bore witness to him, and were amazed at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

[2 : 34] But they said, Is not this Joseph's son? And he said to them, Doubtless you'll quote to me this proverb, Physician, heal yourself. What we've heard you do in Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.

And he said, Truly I say to you, no prophet is acceptable or favorable in his own town. But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over the land.

And Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha.

And none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian. When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.

And they rose up and drove him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.

[3 : 41] And he went down to Capernaum, the city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath. And they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

And in the synagogue, there was a man who had a spirit of an unclean demon. And he cried out with a loud voice, Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, Be silent, and come out of him. And when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm.

And they were all amazed, and said to one another, What is this word? For with authority and power, he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.

And reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region. And he arose and left the synagogue and entered Simon's house. Now Simon's mother-in-law was ill with a high fever, and they appealed to him on her behalf.

[4 : 44] And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her. And immediately she rose and began to serve them. Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him.

And he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying, You are the Son of God. But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

When it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him and would have kept him from leaving them. But he said to them, I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well.

For I was sent for this purpose. And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Amen. And may God bless to us this, his word.

Well, let's turn to Luke chapter 4, page 859, I think, in the Visitor's Bibles.

[5 : 59] And a passage which is all about hearing the Savior. One of the most extraordinary phenomena in the realm of criminal psychology is a condition known as Stockholm Syndrome, where hostages or indeed others caught in some kind of severely abusive relationship when they form a perverse affection for their captor and become emotionally attached to them and dependent on them, so that they begin to defend with them and then even side with them against those who are seeking to liberate them.

The name comes from a bank robbery in Sweden in 1973 where some robbers kept some of the bank staff hostage for six days in the bank vault.

And it seems absolutely absurd and irrational to us, but the hostages began to think that the police were actually the real enemy and that the robbers were actually protecting them.

And even after they were freed, that emotional bonding seemed to persist. One of the female hostages even later became engaged to one of the robbers who had held them captive.

And another one set up a defense fund to try and help them in their trial. Now, it sounds totally astonishing, but it's a well-recognized phenomenon.

[7 : 28] And we see it indeed also in a lesser scale with people who are in very severe and abusive relationships domestically and yet who resist the help that they need to escape.

And sometimes they defend their abuser and they would rather remain captive to their terrors than be totally liberated from bondage.

Well, Luke, the physician who wrote this gospel, is describing something rather similar for us in this chapter that we've read. I guess Luke might have called it Nazareth syndrome.

Because what we see is Jesus, the Savior of the world, come to liberate men and women who are poor, afflicted, who are crushed by the debt of sin, who are in bondage to the evil one.

And his voice has the power to release the oppressor's shackles. His voice has the power to rebuke the power of Satan himself and silence him. And yet, in the synagogue in Nazareth, in Jesus' hometown, that offer of liberation is not simply ignored, but it is resented with furious and violent anger.

[8 : 46] Instead of the light of liberty, they would rather remain in the darkness and the blindness and the captivity and the oppression. And not only that, they fight against the Savior and they try to destroy him and they try to silence him.

So warped and blinded have they become to the reality of their own lives. And so unwilling are they to confront the fact that they actually need his rescue.

But this Nazareth syndrome is not an isolated thing. Like Stockholm syndrome, it actually describes something that is very pervasive and indeed it is universal among our human race.

and it is just as endemic today as it was in first century Palestine. So we need to take it seriously and we need to listen to what Dr. Luke is telling us about the human mind and heart in all its peculiarity, indeed in all its perversity.

Now this whole section that we read, you can see, is clearly bracketed by Luke to tell us that it belongs together and to tell us what it's all about. At verse 15 at the beginning and verse 44 at the end, they enclose the passage and they focus, don't they, on Jesus' voice.

[10:04] Verse 15, he taught in the synagogues and verse 44, he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea. Those are the brackets. And within these brackets, he gives us a typical summary of Jesus' early ministry.

And the camera zooms in, if you like, and we get two close-ups in slow motion of two particular Sabbath days events, first of all in Nazareth in verses 16 to 30, and then Capernaum from verse 31. Now interestingly, both Matthew and Mark in their Gospels, they record this Capernaum ministry of Jesus happening before the story that we read about in Nazareth. Now Luke isn't confused about his chronology.

If you look at verse 23, he clearly tells us that Jesus has already been working in Capernaum. He knows that that came first, but he has ordered his material here in order to help us understand very clearly the point that he's making.

And his whole focus is on listening to Jesus, the Savior of the world. Last time we saw, he focused on seeing salvation in the person of Jesus, but now his focus is on Jesus' voice.

[11:19] It's all about hearing the Savior. And his challenge is there to the synagogue in Nazareth in verse 23. Do you see? Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

So what are you going to do about it? How do you respond to the voice of the Savior of the world? How do you respond to his words of grace and of authority and of power indeed?

And that's the issue. All the focus is on listening to the Savior's voice. A voice that brings a message of release from sin, of rescue from Satan, and yet a voice which is met tragically by rejection of the Savior himself.

Let's look first at verses 14 to 22 where we have a voice that proclaims release from sin. sin. We hear in Jesus' words a gracious call that proclaims release from the crushing debt of sin.

Now verse 14 reminds us that this Jesus that we are reading about is the beloved Son of God. He is the one upon whom the presence of God rests in bodily form by his Spirit.

[12:32] We were told that, remember, at his baptism. And he was filled with the Spirit. He went and was assaulted in the desert by Satan himself but overcame him by his wholehearted obedience to God's Word.

And so now we're told that he returns in the power of the Spirit to Galilee and he is proclaiming the good news of his glorious coming kingdom. And so in verse 16 in his home synagogue he opens the Bible scroll and he reads from the book of Isaiah a wonderful passage about the Messiah, about the Anointed One.

and his very first words are these, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me. And having read, he tells them plainly, I am he.

I am the one whom these Scriptures promised. Notice what he's saying. Jesus is not some novel teacher. He's not beginning some new movement.

He is saying that all God's promises in all the Scriptures, all his promises of salvation are fulfilled in him, in your hearing, says Jesus. And this is a message he's saying that must be heard.

[13:46] Luke's emphasizing that. Look at verse 14 and again verse 37, the same. It's a message that went out to every place, must be heard. But what is this great fulfillment that Jesus is announcing?

That brings liberty to the captives, to the oppressed, that brings recovery of sight to the blind? Well, despite what some have tried to argue in more recent years, he was certainly not speaking about a literal program of releasing prisoners and healing blind people.

That would be a very odd mission, wouldn't it? And a morally questionable one. I wonder if you would vote for the political party that put on their manifesto, we're going to set free all the robbers and the murderers if you vote for us. Of course not.

Nor is it a political liberation theology fomenting revolution to exalt the socially and economically underprivileged at the expense of the fat cat.

Some people want us to think that. Well, of course, Jesus is concerned very much for the poor and the disadvantaged. We'll see that all through the gospel. And for the physically suffering like the blind.

[15:00] But not only the blind, he heals the deaf and the dumb and the paralyzed and lepers and so on. Just as he eats with fat cats, tax collectors and Pharisees. As well as with the poor and the outcast.

Now that is not what Jesus is speaking about here. All you have to do, in fact, is to read the book of Isaiah in its original context. And you'll see that the prophet is speaking about a liberation that is far, far greater than any of these things.

things. This comes from Isaiah 61. In Isaiah chapter 60, the words are full of hope about an end to the darkness of sin and death.

The light of God's great saving glory, bathing the whole world with his saving light. In Isaiah 61, these words go on to speak about God replacing mourning with the oil of joy.

All bereavement will be gone. He speaks about a new heavens and a new earth. He goes on to speak about the wolf and the lamb lying down together, the lion being tamed like the ox, and above all, the serpent who will eat the dust of the earth.

[16:15] Just as earlier on in Isaiah 26 and 27, the prophet sees the punishment forever of Leviathan, that twisting serpent, the dragon who is in the sea.

Surely what Revelation calls that ancient serpent the devil or Satan. He's talking about the banishment of death. He's talking about the resurrection of bodies from the dust of the earth. He will swallow up death forever and the Lord will wipe away tears from all faces. Now no one in that synagogue in Nazareth was in any doubt whatsoever that that is the scale that Jesus was talking about.

That's why verse 20 says all eyes were fixed on him and the words of his grace that were coming out of his mouth. He was pronouncing to them the day of God's grace had come.

As verse 19 says the year of the Lord's favor. In a sense that phrase actually sums up everything he was saying. It's a reference to what was originally called the Jubilee year.

[17:26] Now you can read about this later on don't look now but it's in Leviticus chapter 25. Not only was Israel to have a Sabbath day every week a day of joy and rest from their labors a day that reminded them that no longer were they slaves making bricks in Egypt but they were God's free people in the promised land.

They could sit back they could relax they could enjoy rest but not only that their whole workforce every seventh year were to have a Sabbath year when God's blessing would provide enough from the sixth year that for a whole year nobody had to do any work on the land.

Now imagine that one year in every seven on holiday. That's the joy of Sabbath in the Bible. It's extraordinary isn't it how religion could take something as joyful and wonderful as that and turn it into a burden and a crushing dreadful thing.

But that wasn't all. Not only was every seventh year a Sabbath year but every seventh seventh year there was a Sabbath of Sabbaths.

Every fiftieth year was to be the jubilee year the greatest Sabbath of them all. And Leviticus 25 verse 10 says you shall consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants.

[18:54] It shall be a jubilee for you when each shall return to his property and each to his clan. See in that year all debts of the whole kingdom were cancelled.

Everyone who'd fallen on hard times who'd had to sell their land perhaps or even sell themselves into indentured labor. Every single one of these were released lost and it was a joyous celebration of forgiveness of debts of release from liberty.

And so just as every Sabbath day was a reminder that God's people were no longer slaves in Egypt but were liberated by their Redeemer. And just as every Sabbath year reminded them of that care and provision for their lives, so both of these things reminded them that however hard life became, however deep their own affliction, however dreadful their personal debt might have become, that a jubilee year was coming when all debts would be cancelled, when there would be liberty proclaimed to all, a time of release, of restoration, of joyous rest, of homecoming to families and lands and inheritances, liberated, by the grace of their God.

Now you see when you understand that it was quite understandable how God's prophets when they came to describe the ultimate salvation that God was going to bring for the whole world and his people, that they should use that very imagery of wonderful release, liberty to the captives and the oppressed, good news for the poor, which in the Old Testament of course includes the poor and the

afflicted spiritually as well as those afflicted economically, light for the blind, and all of this and much, much more is what the coming of the year of the Lord's favor will bring because of the cancelling at last of the great debt that every human being faces, that we share with all who are enslaved, that is the crushing debt of sin.

And that is what Jesus is proclaiming here in Nazareth. Verse 43 puts it in Jesus' own words, it was the good news, the gospel of the kingdom of God.

[21 : 23] And just as we're absolutely clear on this, listen to how Luke puts it in Acts 26, verse 18, when Paul tells people what the risen Jesus himself commanded him to proclaim to the world as his gospel.

Listen, Jesus said to Paul, I am sending you to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified through faith in me.

You see, that's Jesus' interpretation in verses 18 and 19 here, no mistake, just the same as John the Baptist was preaching in chapter 3 last week. We're on the cusp, he was saying, of God's final solution to all the problems of this whole world forever.

And that is what Jesus is saying by quoting these words from Isaiah the prophet. And the people knew that and understood that, and that's why they were so amazed. And, if you look at verse 22, very unsettled as well.

How can Joseph's boy speak like this? I wonder what you would include in a program to solve all this world's problems.

[22 : 43] What are the chief problems of this world? Well, for some it's economics. As I said, we're in the midst of the party conference season and there are lots of promises and lots of proposed solutions.

More tax is the solution, according to Mr. Miliband. Less tax, according to Mr. Cameron. More beer, I think, according to Mr. Farage. Some people think that the great problems in the world are social and health problems and the solution is education, contraception, vaccines, that sort of thing. For some, it's problems of power and control and the solutions are armies and air power and diplomacy and security measures and that kind of thing. For some, it's the environment. We need less carbon and more wind and waves and all of that sort of thing.

I wonder what you would say the greatest problems in the world are. Some years ago, the Times newspaper sent letters to famous authors asking them what their answer to the question was, what's wrong with the world today?

And it said that the famous author G.K. Chesterton wrote back like this, Dear sir, I am yours, G.K. Chesterton. And we laughed, but the truth is that none of us really think like that, do we?

[24 : 06] We don't think that we could be the problem. The verb to be is a very irregular verb. I'm normal, you're a bit odd, he's peculiar, they're bonkers.

They're evil. He is a disgrace. You have your faults, but I'm a pretty good person. Isn't that right? When we think of this world needing to be put right, we don't usually include ourselves in that particular equation except perhaps as spectators. Certainly, not if we're sitting in church on a Sunday morning, or in a synagogue in Galilee on a Sabbath morning.

But Jesus looked those people in the eye and he said, I'm speaking to you. You need this. You're the blind. You're the captives.

You're the oppressed. You need rescue. You're crushed by the debt of sin, and I have come to set you at liberation. This is being fulfilled in your hearing for you.

[25 : 19] It was very like Jesus' words in John's vision to the church in Sardis when he said, you have a reputation for being alive, but you are dead.

Wake up, because if you don't, I myself will come against you in judgment. Now, I can tell you that kind of message cannot but cause an almighty rumpus in a respectable congregation who love their Sabbath day exposition.

I know that because I've seen it myself, and so have some of you. And so things turn very suddenly sour in that Nazareth synagogue.

There is an outbreak of acute Nazareth syndrome. How dare you say that to us? Explain yourself, young man. Who do you think you are speaking like that?

Liberation. We've known you all your life, calling us poor, blind, oppressed, captives? Captives to sin and Satan?

[26 : 24] We need some mighty convincing proof that you've got a right to insinuate that we need any help from you. Do again what you did down in Capernaum. Do it right now for us, and maybe, just maybe, we'll hear you out.

That's what they were thinking, exactly, and Jesus knew it, which is why he vocalizes in 23 exactly what their thoughts were. Well, what had he been doing down at Capernaum?

Well, Luke gives us exactly that in verses 31 to 44, where we hear a voice that pronounces rebuke to Satan. We hear in Jesus' words a powerful command that pronounces rescue from the enslaving power of Satan himself.

God once again, although Luke does report Jesus healing and casting out demons here, there is no doubt, I'm sure you'll see, that his focus is on Jesus' voice, and especially on the power and the authority in his words.

Just as in verse 15 and verse 22, verse 32 tells us that he was teaching them. And in verse 36, what is this word?

[27 : 39] For with authority and power, he commands the unclean spirits. With absolute authority, he rebukes the unclean spirits, verse 35 and 41.

And in verse 39, he even rebukes the fever. So, although there are lots of miracles here, Luke's focus is on Jesus' words. And notice, it is preaching of this gospel word that is Jesus' absolute priority.

That's what he says in verse 43. His voice must be heard in these other towns also. That's why, again, in verse 37, Luke tells us, just as he did in verse 14, this good news was going out to every place.

That is Jesus' great priority. It is a word that proclaims rebuke to the powers of evil and commands rescue to those who are in bondage to Satan himself.

And the works of power demonstrate and authenticate the words of Christ's authority. Now, notice here how careful Luke's reporting is.

[28 : 48] I'm sure you did. He distinguishes quite clearly, doesn't he, between ordinary sicknesses and demon possession. Simon's mother-in-law was ill just with a fever, in verse 38.

Actually, where Mark tells us she just had a fever, do you notice Luke's little medical detail? It was a high fever, he notes for us, just a wee mark of authenticity there. And in verse 40, he notes the various diseases of many people, as well, verse 41, as well as some, some who had demons. But if you look at verses 33 to 36, you can see he is clearly focusing on these cases of demonization. As indeed, he does all the way through his gospel.

Luke mentions demonization some 23 or more times, and the majority of them are all in the first nine chapters of his gospel, where he is showing us and making known the nature of God's salvation.

So here, just as Jesus was assaulted in the desert by Satan himself, now he is going on the offensive against Satan's minions, all the powers of darkness. And what Luke is saying to us here, do you see, is this is not just an incidental matter.

[30 : 03] This is the heart of what God's salvation means. The world and human beings need rescue, not just from a debt of sin, but from bondage to the power of sin, to the evil one himself.

That's why there are no politicians in the West and no dictators in the East, no prince, no philosopher in this world who will ever, ever bring the answer that human beings really need. If we're going to see the world that we long for and we long for it to be, that will never come from the power of man. Even if we could dispel all ignorance with education, even if we could eradicate all poverty with politics and economics, even if we could overcome climate change with a zillion, zillion wind turbines, because it is we ourselves who need saving from ourselves and from the powers of evil that have a hold on our humanity, that have a hold on the whole cosmos.

We need rescue. And that is what Jesus came to do and Luke is showing us. The reason that the Son of God appeared, said John, was to destroy the works of the devil.

The devil and his demons know that only too well. Have you come to destroy us? Says the demon here in verse 34. And the answer is yes. As Hebrews 2 says, to destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

[31 : 52] Deliverance from slavery to sickness and death and the devil himself. That is exactly what I have come to bring, says Jesus, and to do it for you.

And that's what we see, all of this wonderful Sabbath day in Capernaum. And again, what a beautiful picture it is of Sabbath liberty, is it not? In the morning, in the congregation all around the world, in the lunchtime and the afternoon, in the home over fellowship and food, and then in the early evening, in the outdoors, one day, one long day of the words and the wonders of God's grace at work, that is real Sabbath.

And it's a picture, it's a foretaste of what one day will be a never-ending jubilee year of Sabbath, jubilee forever, in the kingdom of the great redeemer when he comes to reign forever.

But in the presence of the Savior on earth, we see tokens of that coming glory. This is what life will be like one day forever. C.S.

Lewis says it's like seeing the snowdrops in January, that there are harbingers of spring. We know there'll be many frosts and perhaps much snow before the winter is out, but spring is on the way when you see those snowdrops.

[33 : 17] He says it's like having a glimpse of the very last chapter of a book so that we know how the story is going to end, even though we're only halfway through. Friends, these verses are like that.

They're proclaiming the certain future for this earth. The Son of God came to destroy forever the works of the devil. And the demons know it.

They know who he is and they know why he has come. But they don't understand his kingdom.

They don't understand his timetable. Have you come to destroy us?

Interestingly, in Matthew 8, verse 29, in a similar encounter with demons, they say to Jesus, have you come to destroy us before the time? In other words, they can't understand why if this is the day of destruction, they can't understand what Jesus is saying and what he's doing.

And it's the same here in verse 34. There seems to be surprise. There seems to be confusion. Have you come to destroy us? Notice it's in the plural. It seems that he expects his hold on his victim, the man, to be so powerful that judgment on the demon must also destroy the man.

[34 : 34] He expects the day of God's vengeance on all of his enemies, as the prophets proclaim, the great and awesome day of the Lord, when God will destroy ultimately all evil forever. And we know, don't we, that when the final victory, assault, is unleashed on an enemy city, we know that it's very likely that all who have sided with the enemy are going to be destroyed along with them.

Just as the Bible tells us that all the devil's captives will at last perish along with Satan and all his demons. But not yet, you see.

Jesus has come first to promise the year of the Lord's favor, a time of release from debt, a time of rescue for captives before that great final day of judgment comes.

And that's what we're seeing here in verse 35. At Christ's word of rebuke, the demon is banished and he comes out of the man and do you notice, having done him no harm, release for the captive, liberty for the oppressed.

He came to destroy the works of the evil one and to deliver those subject to lifelong slavery. You see, God's delivering this world from evil is not an abstract thing, it's a personal thing.

[36 : 01] Individual human beings must be rescued from their own personal debt of sin, from their own personal bondage to the evil one. And that's what we're seeing happening here in Capernaum.

Not all, of course, are demonized in this extreme way. Luke is very clear about that. But all are, as Jesus himself tells us, all are slaves to sin.

And each one, whether the particular manifestation of sin's curse is one thing or another, each one needs his word of power. Each one needs the touch of his merciful grace.

did you notice how tender his mercy is? Verse 40, everyone, although they're healed by Jesus' word alone, every one of them feels his touch.

He reaches out to them, embracing them as precious human beings, as precious children of his heavenly father, whom he has come to rescue and restore, to release from the debt of sin, to rescue from the power of Satan.

[37 : 06] sin. And this demonstration is just that. It's real, but it pictures something far, far greater. I mean, in itself, these healings and exorcisms are just temporary, but they picture something that is permanent, something that is everlasting.

They picture the great salvation that comes only through the good news of the kingdom of God, which is what Jesus came to bring to this world. And that's why, he says in verse 43, he cannot be diverted from proclaiming that message.

These folk would one day fall ill again, one day they would die. But everyone who believed his gospel of his kingdom, everyone who trusted his promise would receive a release from sin and a rescue from Satan that would last forever.

And they must hear of that call of grace and that command of power. they must hear it before it's too late while it is still the year of the Lord's favor, before the final day of wrath, before it becomes too late to separate human beings from their sin and from the hold of the evil one so that they are in fact destroyed forever.

And so Jesus says to go back to the synagogue in Nazareth, he says today, today, this is fulfilled in your hearing. today is the year of the Lord's favor for you to be released from your sin, to be rescued from the power of evil.

[38 : 40] You need to be rescued. And only I can do that and I am here to do that. He's saying exactly what Paul says later on to the people of Corinth in 2 Corinthians 6, behold, now is the favorable time.

Behold, now is the day of salvation. salvation. Now, Nazareth, is the time for you to turn from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, that you may receive forgiveness for your sins, and you may receive a place among the sanctified, among the holy ones of God, through faith in me, Jesus is saying.

But the problem that day is the problem that we see all through Luke's gospel, all through the apostolic ministry in Acts, and still all over the world today, when that kind of gospel is proclaimed. People say with one heart and voice, what a damn cheek. Who do you think you are to insult me like that? Let's home in on verses 23 to 30, where we hear in Jesus' words this voice that provokes a rejection of salvation.

Jesus' words forth, a personal confrontation that provokes angry rejection of the person of the Savior himself. Stockholm syndrome is very dangerous.

[40 : 13] Quite literally, puts people's lives in danger because of their totally warped affections and their deluded thinking. That makes them resist rescue, makes them risk their own bodily safety.

Stockholm syndrome can be fatal. But friends, Nazareth syndrome is far, far more dangerous. It's so very pervasive and endemic in the human heart and its consequences are permanent and fatal and eternal.

Nazareth syndrome leads to hell because it warps our minds into thinking that we are not a part of this world's problem, that we are not like others whose lives are a mess, who do need help, that we're not the poor and the blind and the captive to sin and the oppressed to evil.

And so not only do we not think we need rescue, we find it offensive if anyone suggests it and we resist it furiously if anyone tries to persuade us that we do.

And so we try and discredit the Savior, Jesus Christ, in order so that we can disregard his message. And if we can't do that, we will try to silence him and silence anyone who speaks for him.

[41 : 29] That's what these verses documenting that first index case of Nazareth syndrome, that's what they describe. They discredit Jesus. He's just Joseph's son, what does he know?

And then when they can't discredit him, verse 29, do you see? Their rage leads them to try and destroy him by throwing him off a cliff. But Marek is protected, interestingly, just in the very way that those scriptures that the devil used to try and tempt him, chapter 3, just as they promised.

Which just reminds us, doesn't it, that if we don't seek to twist and abuse the scriptures for our own ends, we can always trust their promises, always. But notice Jesus' response to their unbelief, because unbelief it was, Mark and Matthew make that very explicit.

But Luke makes the point by recording Jesus' own words to them, which were a direct challenge and rebuke. Look at verse 25. They're proud of their Israelite heritage and their synagogue.

They're like those who came to John the Baptist saying, oh, we've got Abraham as our father. Well, says Jesus, remember your Israelite history. In the time of the great prophets Elijah and Elisha, your forefathers were so sinful and rebellious that God sent famine on the land, no rain, for three and a half years.

[42 : 52] And it was a pagan widow that God blessed with life-saving flour and oil through Elijah, not the Israelites. She knew she was an extremist.

She was down to her last morsel of bread and oil. You can read the story in 1 Kings 17. So when Elijah said to her, if you give me something to eat first, God will bless you with oil that never runs out and flour to feed your family.

when he said that to her, she knew that she literally had nothing to lose. And so she threw herself on his offer and God saved her.

And she said, quote, now I know that the word of the Lord in your mouth is truth. And she received God's truth and was rescued from her calamity.

And Naaman, remember the proud Syrian soldier who had leprosy, he at first refused to humble himself and he was told to go and wash in Israel's feeble, dirty river Jordan. But his servant said to him, do you remember, is this not a great word that the prophet has spoken to you?

[43 : 57] Will you not do it? Wash and be clean. And in the end, because he knew he was a leper and he needed cleansing, he humbled himself, we're told, according to the word of the man of God and he was restored.

And he said, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. You see, both of these pagans, with none of the privilege of Israel's knowledge, none of their blessings, but they trusted and they proved the good news of God to be true and to be wonderful for them.

They didn't have Nazareth syndrome, or they got over their Nazareth syndrome. They opened their eyes to the truth about their need, because their circumstances perhaps forced them to see reality. And so they welcomed that saving word of power. But even when the living word and the person of God, the Son himself, both read God's word to them and then pointedly told them, this is what you need today and I am here to give it to you.

the people of Nazareth were provoked. They rejected the very salvation that was being held out to them in the call of Christ's grace.

[45 : 22] They spurned the power of his command which could release them from the crushing debt of sin and the oppressive bondage to the evil one. How dare you suggest that we, we need this?

just like Israel in Elijah and Elisha's day, for all their pedigree, they resist the Son of God who brings the Spirit of God.

Mr. Stephen put it a little later in Acts chapter 7, perhaps speaking to some of the same people who heard Jesus that day, certainly with the same syndrome, uncircumcised in hearts and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit as your fathers did, so do you.

And when they heard that from him, do you remember, they stoned him to death, just as they would have done to Jesus here. Nazareth syndrome can be very, very angry and very violent.

And you see, friends, Luke wants Theophilus and his other readers, including us, he wants us to know that. He wants us to know that when people reject the message of Jesus, it is not, as they may say, because the evidence is inadequate, certainly wasn't inadequate here, was it?

[46 : 39] Luke deliberately shows us what they knew only too well had happened in Capernaum. It is not because the evidence is inadequate, but it is because the message is offensive, and the implications of it are intolerable, that I am so poor and needy, blind, and in darkness, and in inescapable debt, captive to the devil.

It is an outrage to my identity for you to suggest that. Yes, says Luke, people become enraged, even at the gracious words of Jesus, enraged at a gospel of grace because the grace in the gospel demands that we hear and accept the truth about ourselves, that we are in bondage to sin, that we are helpless, and that we need total rescue from outside of ourselves.

And rather than face reality, just like Stockholm syndrome, we would rather bend and twist reality and quite literally prefer the devil we know, who gladly colludes with us to give us a sense of security and protection.

We would rather side with him against the very Savior who alone can be our rescuer, to bring release and liberation, to restore life in all its fullness.

And unless something breaks in to life with such calamitous force to shake us out of those comfortable delusions, to force us to see reality, like perhaps a terrible illness like leprosy, like an economic calamity like this widow faced, unless that happens, it is so easy to remain willingly blind and deaf to the Savior's call.

[48 : 35] What a mercy those earthly calamities were to that widow and to Naaman. That's why in Luke 18, Luke tells us that it's harder or easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God, because he thinks he is free and prosperous and has no need.

And then Luke tells us about the blind beggar straight afterwards who shouts and shouts and shouts for Jesus until he comes to him and heals him because he knows he has a need.

I don't think anything's changed today, has it? A friend of mine in Australia once said to me, do you know, evangelism in Sydney is so very hard because everybody here thinks they're already in paradise.

Well, we don't have the beaches here perhaps, but for all the moons in our western world generally, we have so much and we think we know so much that we just find Christ's message unacceptable, unfavorable, just as they did in Nazareth that day.

Jesus plays on that word deliberately. He speaks in verse 19 of the acceptable year of the Lord, the year of the Lord's favor. Yet he says in verse 24, he was the prophet who was not accepted, not favored.

[49 : 59] Perhaps we've been so materially favored, we just don't think we need the message of the year of the Lord's favor. But friends, we do.

We do. Jesus was very deliberate here in his reading of the prophet Isaiah, very deliberate where he stopped his reading with those words, the year of the Lord's favor.

The very next words in Isaiah's text are these, and the day of vengeance of our God.

The demons were right. The day of judgment, the day of final destruction is coming, when all who remain captive to Satan, shall at last be punished and destroyed forever.

The demons are right about that. What they cannot fathom is the mercy of God, who through the willing sacrifice of himself in the cross of God the Son, has extended not just a day, but a year of favor for his gospel to go out, to be heard in every place, to every tribe and every nation.

[51 : 20] Today, this year of the Lord's favor is proclaimed in your hearing, says Jesus. Friends, don't close your ears, don't close your hearts.

Hear the Savior. Rejoice in his release today, in the year of his favor. Don't wait don't wait for the rebuke on the day of his wrath.

Let's pray together. You say, I am rich, I have prospered, I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourselves, and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

Those whom I love I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come into him and eat with him and eat with me.

[52 : 41] The one who conquers, I will give him to sit with me on my throne as I also conquered and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has ears to hear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches.

Heavenly Father, open our ears, every one of us here in this church this morning that we may hear the words of the Savior and rejoice in the year of your favor.

Amen. Amen.