

Luke 4:14-30 – Follow the Leader

- Snowboarding Introduction
- Pictures of “me” snowboarding
- Snowboarding “follow-the-leader” style

If we are going to grow for God’s glory, we must learn to follow the leader—that is, we must humbly follow the Lord Jesus Christ and joyfully serve Him according to His will for the purpose of glorifying Him.

- Read Luke 4:14-30
- Pray

Several weeks ago, we looked together at the first part of this passage, verses 14-21, in which Jesus boldly announces Himself to be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel, the very Savior who fulfills the prophesy about the Messiah that He reads from Isaiah 61 in verses 18 and 19: *“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, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”* And then in verse 21, He authoritatively asserts, *“Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”*

Today, we are going to focus on the verses that follow this magnificent announcement of Jesus. In particular, I am fascinated by the statement Jesus makes in verse 24, where he says to the crowd, *“no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”* In fact, I find this question so interesting that we are going to spend the next two weeks answering it, and I hope that over the course of these two messages, you will become as enthralled with this captivating statement of Jesus as I am, if not more so.

So, then, what *does* Jesus mean when He says *“No prophet is accepted in his hometown.”* The answer that is traditionally given to this question is that people, by nature, tend to overlook and undervalue that which is familiar to them. I agree with this interpretation. Not only so, but I also believe it unearths an insightful tendency of human nature—that is, our proclivity to flout the familiar. Moreover, this dangerous tendency brings with it significant spiritual hazards that we will be blessed to consider. However, I am saving that discussion for next week, in a sermon we will call “Amazed by Grace.” Through that sermon I hope to highlight the critically important message that we must never take God’s graces for granted or grow too comfortable with them for our own good.

Having said that, and looking forward to that message, I must say that, while this traditional explanation as to why a prophet is not accepted in his hometown is true and valuable, I do not think it is the *best* answer to the question at hand. In other words, I am convinced that the familiarity with Jesus among those in Nazareth proved to be a giant stumbling block for them, but I do not believe this familiarity was their most damaging stumbling block.

Let me explain what I mean. While the people were clearly amazed that the man who stood before them claiming to be the Messiah was the same Son of Joseph that they had known for 30 years, we must recall that Jesus had never committed any sin of any kind, not even as a young boy in Nazareth. While the past lives of some prophets might have given Israelites some cause to doubt the veracity of their words, we cannot accept this to have been true of Jesus. Do misunderstand me, we know that many people to whom Jesus spoke certainly doubted his words, but, at the same time, we must know that the reason why they doubted never had to do with anything that Jesus had ever said or done. In other words, any doubts that arise about Jesus Christ always arise out of our *own* deficiencies, never His.

Let's think about it, what could the people have ever seen in Christ that would have given them legitimate cause to doubt Him or call Him a liar? If we know our Lord, we must agree that the answer has to be "nothing at all." If anything, Christ's legacy in Nazareth should have served to strengthen His testimony as the Messiah. If anyone was ever a light that shone so brightly before men that they would see His good deeds and give glory to God, it was our Jesus Christ. We can be absolutely certain that Jesus maintained a perfectly flawless witness among His hometown community. Thus, the traditional interpretation about hometown familiarity with Jesus, while still very useful, is not enough. What is more, even if we assume that personal familiarity *is* the sole reason why most prophets are not accepted in their hometowns, this explanation can in no way explain why the people would soon try to murder Jesus.

No, there is something else going on in these verses that I believed we are blessed to consider this morning. There is, yet, a better explanation as to why Jesus says "no prophet is accepted in his hometown," and I believe it is this: Hometown folks are prone to regard hometown prophets with a spirit of entitlement. In my mind, this understanding has considerably more explanatory power in this passage and in life in general.

For example, have you ever known of any hometown boys or girls who made it big or struck it rich? How do the hometown folks usually respond to that kind of occurrence? They get excited, don't they? They get all fired up, and they start boasting about that famous girl who used to live down the street but is now starring in the biggest Hollywood movie of the summer. They start telling stories about how they used to throw fastballs to that hometown boy who is now playing in the World Series.

This type of excitement is very similar what we see happening with Jesus in our passage this morning. In verses 20 and 21, Luke paints a majestic picture of this particular Sabbath day. We see Jesus rising in His hometown synagogue among His hometown folks—most of whom have known Him His entire life, and nearly all of which had heard about the tremendous miracles He had been working in Capernaum and Samaria. This hometown Hero rises in their midst, reads from the book of Isaiah about the coming of the Messiah, and authoritatively declares in the assembly that He is the long-awaited King of Kings and Lord of the Lords—the very Savior of the world. And how do they react? They are thrilled!

In verse 22 we read that, *“All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips.”* We are blessed to note that, although most of them do not at this point fully understand what Jesus is saying about Himself, they are, nonetheless, loving what He is saying. Notice: They seem to have absolutely no problems with His message...at least not yet. And not only are they thrilled with His message, but they begin asking *“Isn't this Joseph's Son?”* You know, I really do not think they are asking this question because they are unsure about His identity. No way! Jesus spent roughly thirty years in that very community, working, fellowshiping, and worshipping alongside the very people that have now gathered to hear what He has to say.

These people are not seeking information. No. Rather, I believe they are beginning to reminisce. The excitement about this hometown boy turned Miracle Worker and Prophet of Israel is already bringing to mind memories and stories of old, and the hometown folk are saying to themselves things like, “Why I remember when that ol' boy helped our family build a house as a surprise wedding gift for our grandson,” or “Lookey here! My very own cousin Jesus is gonna be the most famous person in all of Israel!” or even “Woohoo! Our ship has finally come in; praise God Almighty!” As the verses that follow make clear, these people are not at this time thinking about Jesus and what He is saying. No, they are thinking about themselves. Although their lips are speaking well of Him outwardly, their desires are clearly focused on self.

Imagine right now that your brother or sister calls you this afternoon and tells you he or she has won the big Lotto jackpot. Honestly, now, what is the first thought that you are likely to think? Are you thinking, “Wow! The title of that jackpot will surely be a blessing to the cause of the Gospel?” Very unlikely. How about this thought: “I’m just so happy for them!” Maybe. But most likely, if this Lotto scenario were a reality, you and I are going to be thinking, “Weehee! How can I help them spend it?!” This is the type of thinking that I believe is going on in this passage. By and large, although the people in the synagogue with Jesus that day were listening to Jesus, they were thinking about themselves.

That is the plight of the hometown prophet. When the message comes from afar, you and I are more likely to look outward and think of the larger world around us. However, when the message comes from one within, we are prone to focus on self and make the message and ministry all about ourselves. While we would never admit it, we begin to adopt a steadfast “What’s in it for me?” mentality.

-- Video – Me Church

In verses 23-30, we can see that this “What’s in it for me?” mentality was clearly the mindset of the people in Nazareth on that day Jesus spoke to them in the synagogue. And Jesus knew it. Look with me at verse 23. He knew exactly what the people were thinking and He tells them so. He says, “*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.’*” Jesus knew that most of the people had not really come that day to worship God and submit their lives to His will. No, they had come to be entertained and fascinated. They had heard about the miracles Jesus had performed elsewhere, and they wanted to see the excitement for themselves. Even more, I am convinced that they expected Jesus to have saved His best miracles for them, since they were His hometown crowd.

However, notice how quickly the mood of the people morphs from amazement and approbation to hatred and malice. Whereas in verse 22 everyone was boasting about Jesus in amazement, in verses 28-29 the same people have become so furious with Him that they attempt to murder Him by tossing Him off of a cliff! What could Jesus have possibly said or done in the space of five verses that would result in such a dramatic reversal of fortune. Did He cast aspersions upon them? No. Did He take His Father’s name in vain or curse God? Of course not! How, then, we are blessed to ask, did He make the people so incredibly angry? Well, you may not believe me when I tell you the answer, but it is the truth: He makes

them so very irate merely by reminding them of two obvious, yet unpopular (to say the least) Scriptural truths, which they already knew and should have understood.

In these five tempestuous verses (v. 23-27), Jesus simply directs the Nazarenes to two examples of what God had done in the past, reminding them that Elijah and Elisha had been sent to Gentile, not Hebrew, audiences. He did this in order to impress upon His hometown crowd a vital truth. He was telling them that, just as in the past when God sent His prophets to the Gentiles, so the purposes for which Jesus had come were far more significant than entertaining His hometown crowd with miracles and wonders. In essence, Jesus is saying, “My purposes are infinitely more important than your amusement and your glory.” As becomes crystal clear, the Nazarenes did not want to hear that message.

Do you find these events as ridiculous as I do—that a group of people...in a synagogue...on the Sabbath day could be so enraged by clear truths from Scripture? Well, we need not look any farther than the homosexual agenda or other sexual “liberations” sweeping through entire denominations to see that we are not much different today. God’s will on these matters is clearly revealed in His Word, yet still the world still insists upon its own version of truth, and it will do most anything to silence opposing voices...even the voice of God. In short, I hope we recognize that any kind of “What’s in it for me?” approach to Christianity utterly obstructs spiritual growth.

What, then, does all of this mean for you and me this morning? That is to say, how do we apply this passage to our lives for the glory of God? The answer to these questions, I believe, lies in the title to this message—“Follow the Leader.” In order for us to sustain and maximize both personal spiritual growth and the growth of our church as a whole, we must follow our leader, the Lord Jesus Christ, in two extremely significant ways.

-- First, you and I must come to be followers, not to be followed.

Before I explain what I mean by this, let me first make clear what I do not mean. // There can be no doubt that God calls individuals to positions of leadership in the church. Indeed, throughout the history of revelation, we see God calling and appointing individuals to different positions of authority. And in the Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus), the Apostle Paul provides detailed instructions for choosing leaders and gives instructions about the duties and required characteristics of those leaders. Furthermore, leaders called by God are meant to serve as positive examples and models of godliness. Paul makes this point in

Philippians 4:9, where he writes, “*Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.*”

Now, allow me to explain what this does mean. We must be aware, that whenever Paul commands us to imitate him, he is really commanding us to do something much greater. He is commanding us to follow the One whom he himself was following—that is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul makes this truth plain in 1 Corinthians 11:1, where he says, “*Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.*” Here, we see a vital truth of Scripture revealed, and that is this: In God’s economy, every leader in every church must be a follower first; they must follow Jesus Christ. Paul clearly understood leadership in this way, and so did our Lord. In Mark 10:43-44, Jesus declares, “*Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all.*”

In contrast, the people to whom Christ spoke in Nazareth that day were not interested in following Him. No, they wanted to be followed. They hated God’s will, and they were bent on doing things their own way. Even though Jesus quoted to them obvious truths of Scripture, they didn’t care; their sinful pride refused to allow them to be the type of followers Jesus was calling to Himself. Instead, they were determined that their own idea of religion would be followed, even at the cost of murdering the very Son of God.

If, then, we are going to grow for the glory of God, we must come together as a congregation of followers. We must realize that, ultimately, we are not in charge of anything at all. This church is Christ’s church and we are His servants. He sets the course, and we follow Him. // God’s Word is our sole rule for faith and practice, not popular opinion or exit polls. To grow for God’s glory, we absolutely must heed the commandment given by Jesus in Matthew 16:24, where He said to his disciples, “*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*” If we are to grow as God’s people, then we must come not to be followed, but to be followers of Christ.

Our second point of application this morning is this: Now listen to this... We must come to be servants, not to be served.

If following the example of Jesus Christ means anything at all, it has to mean joyfully assuming the role of a servant. In Mark 10:43-44, Jesus reveals this very truth about the type of example He sets, when He says, “*Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” // If

we follow the example of our Leader, we will live as givers, not takers. We will daily learn to be servants at heart.

What we see from the people in Nazareth in this morning's Scripture passage is quite the opposite. We see them coming to Christ with selfish purposes and deadly motivations. They wanted to be entertained; they wanted to be catered to and coddled; they want to be favored by their home town Hero. They were not in the synagogue that day to see how they might best love and serve Jesus; no, they had come to see what Jesus would do for them.

Let me ask you, are we wholeheartedly committed to becoming more like Christ each day of this life? Are we really committed to this congregation and to its growth for the glory of God? If we are, then we must never come to church according to the manner in which the Nazarenes came to the synagogue that day. Their desire was to be served, and that desire was so intense that they nearly murdered the only perfect servant history has ever known. If we are committed to submitting to God's will for our lives, then we must all come to *give*, not to *get*. We must come to *serve*, not to *be* served. In other words, to modify the famous words of John F. Kennedy, "Ask not what your church can do for you, ask what you can do for your church!"

Please ask yourself this morning (Application Questions): Which is greater, your desire to *serve* others or your desire to be served *by* others? Or, asked in a slightly different way: Which of these questions comes to your mind more often: (1) How is the church meeting *my* needs? or (2) How can I meet the needs of *others* in my church? Do we ever think thoughts like, "Boy, the church sure could use help with childcare"? If we do (and I hope that we do), I pray that you have also been known to ask, "Hey, how can I help meet that need?" If we are concerned about people in our congregation and our community who are all alone or hurting and are in need of a personal visit (and we should be), then I pray we are, at the same time, people who actually go and make those visits.

As I preach these words this morning, my heart is at the same time flooded with thanksgiving and clouded with concern. I praise God with joy for those of you constantly prove that you already understand this truth of Scripture. So very many of you are extraordinarily faithful servants, and because of your service, we are a church that is doing many wonderful works that give God great glory. I would love to stand up here and recognize each of your selfless acts of service, but that would take all week, and even then I would surely miss someone. Nonetheless, to those of you who give so much and serve so faithfully for the glory of God here at

First Baptist Church, let me say that my words simply cannot express the joy I have in the presence of the Lord because of you and your service.

And then, alongside this remarkable thanksgiving, there is also concern. Because I know that God receives such tremendous praise and glory when His servants selflessly serve Him, I grieve for those who do not seem to get it. My spirit hurts for those who know the good that they ought to be doing in service to Christ, but keep choosing to do something else anyway. For as the book of James concisely declares, (James 4:17) “*Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*” My heart goes out to people when I see the gifts and talents that God has given them for His glory being applied to every purpose under the sun except the humble, self-sacrificing service of Christ. I am saddened to see so many opportunities for obedience to God’s call ignored and to see the potential joy of truly selfless service squandered.

Please understand, God is not calling you to serve because He is scratching His head in desperate need of our service. The truth is that God doesn’t really *need* us at all. He loves us more than we could ever imagine, and He wants us to be with Him in His perfect kingdom forever. Even more, God gives us the awesome privilege of being used of Him to bring about His perfect purposes. But He doesn’t *need* us. No, we serve Him because He is God Almighty and because He decisively commands us to do so. We serve Him because He is glorified when we do and because He wants to bless others through us.

With all that said, let me close with this final thought. There is one truth about which I am certain this morning: If you and I will all come together with the purpose of following Jesus, and if we all come together to serve Him selflessly—if we come to give and not to get—then there will be very few needs of our congregation that would ever go unmet.

Let me ask you, whom *are* you following and where *are* you serving?