

Responding to Rejection

Luke 4:14-30

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Summary: As Jesus prepares to give His first sermon in His hometown, He was likely excited to reveal himself to his family, friends, and hometown. But the reaction to Jesus' sermon might surprise you! Join Stephen today as he explores the lessons we can learn from rejection.

In an audience this size, I realize that I am speaking to quite a number of schoolteachers, college and graduate school professors, chaplains, Bible study leaders, and Sunday school teachers.

You might be in the corporate world or in sales, where you often give presentations to groups of colleagues or potential clients.

You have grown accustomed, over time, to public speaking.

But more than likely, you well remember the first time you stood to speak to a group of people. You can still remember how nervous and fearful you were; how alert, if not overly sensitive to the reactions of those in your audience, and you were probably glad when it was all over, and you were able to sit back down.

In high school, our church had one Sunday every year called Teen Sunday.

And the youth pastor followed a tradition in choosing a senior from the youth group to deliver the sermon. My senior year, he asked me to do it.

I foolishly agreed. I thought it might be fun. But the closer that day came, the more terrified I became. Finally, the day arrived; I can remember speaking from the Book of Nehemiah. It lasted about 12 minutes.

I have no idea what I said, I was probably making stuff up. Afterward, an older man came up to me—he was probably 35—and told me, “That was a fine sermon.”

There is something unforgettable about the first time you opened the Word and addressed that Adult Bible Fellowship, or that group of teens, or that men's or women's Bible study, or that baseball team or that VBS gathering.

It was very intimidating; it was even disheartening. You wanted to do a good job and probably didn't think you did; you were too easily distracted by the facial expressions of your audience; you wanted to say everything just right. And afterward, only one person—if that—said anything in response.

I have read about a young man who'd been away from his hometown for some time after entering the ministry, and when he returned home, he was invited to preach, and everyone packed the house to hear him.

But what he decided to preach about was so convicting and so upsetting and so challenging, that when he finished his sermon, the congregation never wanted to hear him again, and they never did.

Let me show you where it happened: Luke's Gospel, chapter 4. The preacher is Jesus, and He's about to preach His very first—and last—sermon in His hometown of Nazareth.

Keep in mind that by now, Jesus had become a household name. The news of His miracles had reached Nazareth and He was becoming famous throughout the land, notice **verse 14**:

And Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee, and a report about him went out through all the surrounding country. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.

Luke 4:14-15

This is heady stuff.

The verb **being glorified** is in the present tense. In other words, everybody is giving Jesus *continual* acclaim.

David E. Garland, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke* (Zondervan, 2011), p. 194

He's in the newspapers and on all the billboards; everybody wants to meet Him and hear Him; everybody is literally singing His praises, "You have to hear Him open the word, and you must see the miracles He's doing; there's nobody like Jesus!"

We know from other Gospel accounts that Jesus has just finished a rather miraculous season of ministry in Capernaum, about 20 miles away.

And word has spread back to Nazareth like wildfire.

Verse 16 tells us that he finally arrives at his home village of Nazareth where he had grown up. Newspapers would have headlined, "Jesus given hometown celebration."

Archeologists have uncovered the village of Nazareth, dating back to the days of Jesus; it had a population of around 400. It was so poor a village, none of its streets were paved with stone, no public structures were found, and no fine pottery was discovered anywhere. Just common ordinary stuff.

Adapted from Garland, pl. 195

So little Nazareth, which already had a reputation for producing nothing of significance (John 1:46), has suddenly entered the spotlight. This is the hometown of Jesus the miracle worker. People will want to come and see the little workshop and the house where Jesus grew up. They could sell tickets for that matter!

As we'll see, Nazareth wanted some special attention, they were the neighbors and friends and clients of Jesus; this was His hometown and here He comes.

By the way, this will be the first sermon Jesus preaches to His hometown crowd. And you can easily imagine all 400 people packing in and around the synagogue to hear Jesus preach.

Now verse 16:

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 good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the

blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Luke 4:16-20

In typical fashion, the reader stood to read the Hebrew text, typically no more than three verses at a time. The verses would be translated into Greek or Aramaic for the benefit of the audience.

Ibid. p. 403

Following the reading, someone would speak, and obviously, in this case, Jesus took the seat of the teacher.

Now we're actually not given His sermon, by the way. We're only given His text and His main point, which He delivers here in **verse 21:**

And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.

Luke 4:21-22a

Jesus must have given quite an amazing exposition on this prophecy from Isaiah, and everybody loved it—evidently—look

at the result: **they spoke well of him; they marveled at His words!**

Everybody is nudging each other and whispering, “Man, what a sermon!” Everybody is taking notes; they’re on the edge of their seats. Nobody is sleeping during this sermon—I wonder what that’s like!

Now the Jewish people loved this particular prophecy from Isaiah, and for good reason—just look at all the things the Messiah was going to do: end poverty, free everyone from oppression, give sight to the blind.

When the anointed one arrives—this is a Messianic expression—life will get better for everyone in the nation of Israel.

And Jesus makes this stunning announcement here that He was the one Isaiah was talking about. **Verse 21 again:**

“Today, this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:21b

You could translate this to mean, “This Scripture has been fulfilled while you have been listening to it.”

J. Reiling and J. L. Swellengrebel, [A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Luke](#) (United Bible Societies, 1971), p. 203

“I am this anointed one; I am the Messiah whom Isaiah prophesied will come; I am here *now!*”



Did you have any expectations of God when you were first saved? What did you think He would do for you? Was God’s plan different from your expectations?

And Nazareth is immediately thinking, “we’re His hometown; we’re His people; we will get the best of what He has to offer; we’ll be at the front of the line.

But the problem is that this prophecy is spiritual long before it is physical.

The Messiah arrives first to save, and then the glorious kingdom arrives at a later time. By the way, 2,000 years later, it still hasn’t arrived.

But right now, Jesus says, He is proclaiming good news to the **poor**. The word for poor here is the same word Jesus used in His sermon on the mountainside, a reference to spiritual poverty; those who recognize they are spiritually poor and bankrupt and are ready to receive the treasure of the gospel.

Jesus is now proclaiming liberty to the captives. This is more than releasing people from bondage or jail; this is release from the enslavement of sin and the kingdom of darkness.

Giving sight to the blind is more than physical. Jesus will refer to the blind religious leaders leading the blind (**Matthew 15:14**). The blind are those

who are spiritually lost and need their eyes opened to the glorious light of the gospel (**Acts 26:18; 2 Corinthians 4:4**).

But wait a second! Back to the main point, Jesus is the Messiah? Somebody pipes up in **verse 22** and says, “Hold on a minute, aren’t you Joseph’s son?”

Mark’s account of this event includes the information that Mary was in the audience as well as the half-brothers of Jesus and His half-sisters, born to Joseph and Mary after Jesus’ virgin birth.

Remember, there are people in this synagogue who grew up with Jesus; they knew his parents; they had their homes repaired by Joseph with Jesus tagging along.

One author put it this way: “You can just imagine some woman standing in the back thinking, “Wait, I remember you used to climb the olive tree in my yard, and I told you to get down out of that olive tree before you break your neck. Yeah, I don’t think you’re the Messiah. There was a man sitting there thinking, “I remember we used to play as kids down at the edge of the ravine, throwing stones in there—I could throw farther than you could—I don’t think you’re the Messiah.”

Kevin Miller, *Sermon Transcript* (Church of the Savior, Wheaton, Illinois)

They loved His sermon, but His main point is starting to sink in.

I mean, it’s one thing to be a miracle worker, it’s another thing to think you’re the Messiah.

And Jesus reads their minds, because He really is the Messiah—**verse 23**:

*And he said to them,
“Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’”*

Luke 4:23a

“Physician, heal yourself.” This was a common expression in Jesus’s day, found in both Jewish and Greek writings. It simply means, “Prove your worth as a physician.” But in this context, Jesus is exposing their pride, this could mean, “Physician, heal your own people rather than those outsiders from Capernaum.”

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Matthew-Luke (Zondervan, 2002), p. 363

Notice further in verse 23:

*“What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.”
And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.”*

Luke 4:23b-24

In other words, “You won’t take my word for it; you won’t believe what I am telling you in truth about who I am; you just want a show.”

You see, these villagers want Jesus to prove His stuff. “Let’s see some fireworks; show us some amazing miracles!”

Mark's Gospel account of this same event will mention that Jesus **did no mighty works** in Nazareth because of **their unbelief (Mark 6:5-6)**.

In other words, He's not about to put on a sideshow to impress His hometown audience.

Instead, He changes gears and addresses their underlying rebellion against God's Word and their unwillingness to listen to a prophet of God, much less the Messiah.

Verse 25:

"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 all 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."

Luke 4:25-26

What Jesus does now is dip back into Israel's history—to a dark time of unbelief—with two illustrations.

And this first illustration takes us back to **1 Kings 17** where a wicked king and queen named Ahab and Jezebel ruled this same territory where Nazareth sits. They were cruel, corrupt and they led the Israelites in the worship of Baal. In fact, Jezebel was the patron saint of Baal worship—she personally paid out of the

royal treasury the salaries for 450 false prophets of Baal.

Since Baal was supposedly in control of the weather—he was supposedly the god of rainstorms—God caused a drought, and it didn't rain for three years. And God sent a prophet by the name of Elijah to confront Ahab and the idolatrous nation of Israel.

During this drought, while the Israelites suffered near starvation, God sent Elijah to help a Gentile widow who lived in Sidon, the hometown of Jezebel.

So, of all places, the prophet of God goes to one of the most unlikely places and to a most unlikely person who would ever believe the word of God's prophet.

When Elijah encounters her, she's about to use her last remaining flour and oil to bake a little loaf of bread for her and her son, and after that they will be out of food and she fully expects to die.

Elijah announces who he is and essentially tells her to trust his word—the word of the Lord—and give him the loaf of bread first, and then he promises her that she will not run out of flour and oil during the rest of this famine.

But get this, she has to trust his word without seeing any miracle. The miracle comes *after* believing his word.

And this Gentile widow believes and is saved!

Jesus is essentially saying to the Jewish people of Nazareth, packed into this synagogue, that they don't have the faith

of a Gentile widow who lived in Jezebel's old neighborhood.

She believed the prophet of God, but they will not.

You can imagine the nudging and whispering that's starting to buzz around the synagogue now.

This is insulting! He's telling us we're sinners in need of saving like some Gentile idolater! What kind of message is this? Who does He think He is to be so judgmental of us?

This is the heart of unbelieving mankind, whether they are religious or not, from the first century to the 21st century.

I pulled this from our local newspaper some time ago, where a pastor was interviewed about his church and was asked by the reporter, "What would you tell someone who's thinking of visiting your church?" He said, "We would tell them that they would be welcome regardless of their belief system; we don't try to convert anybody." The reporter asked, "Well, what are you known for? What kind of message do you give people?" And he responded, "We have a positive spiritual message, so that we can feel better when we leave than when we come in."

I couldn't help but think, whatever you do, don't invite Jesus to do the preaching.

He is going to tell us our only hope is *in* conversion; our only hope is in redemption; our only hope is for someone

to tell us the truth about who we are, that we are lost sinners, and there happens to be a loving Savior.

Jesus isn't finished here, yet.

Verse 27:

"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."

Luke 4:27

This time, Jesus fast forwards the tape to **2 Kings 5**. This is the scene where a gentile warrior of Syria—despised Gentile enemies of Israel—has the audacity to drive his chariot along with some soldiers into the land and approach the great prophet of Israel, asking to be healed of leprosy.

Doesn't he know that leprosy was a sign of sin and judgment and he should expect nothing from God other than judgment for his sin?

I mean, who does this Gentile think he is? He has no right to the miraculous power of a redeeming God!

But instead of turning him away, Elisha sends him a message to go and wash in the Jordan River, immersing himself seven times.

The commander recoils against such a humiliating assignment; he expected Elisha to wave his hand in the air and say something magical.

Get this: Elisha wants him to trust his word, the word of the Lord through His prophet.

And when Naaman listened, he went down into the Jordan and came up clean.

Now the key word here is the word **clean**. Jesus doesn't say he was "cured;" cured is merely physical, but that he was cleansed—that word is a reference to the cleansing of sin and becoming right with God.

And notice here that Jesus says in **verse 27** that none of the lepers in Israel experienced cleansing, but only this pagan enemy of Israel who was willing to believe the word of God's prophet.

And here's the point that the people in Nazareth immediately understood: Jesus is the prophet they are refusing to believe, which means they are worse off than apostate Gentiles. Jesus is telling these synagogue-keeping Jews that they are unclean while Gentiles who believe Him will be cleansed.

Adapted from Garland, p. 205

And even more specifically, Jesus was daring to suggest that Gentiles are more worthy of His teaching and healing ministry than they are in Nazareth.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 109

And that did it. It was like a nuclear bomb went off in this synagogue.

They didn't even wait for the final benediction, the blessing of Aaron, the final Amens.

R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: Volume 1* (Crossway Books, 1998), p. 145

They exploded with self-righteous fury—**verse 29**:

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

Luke 4:29

They're gonna kill him!

Never mind a trial! They don't need a trial. They were claiming to act according to Deuteronomy 13, which allowed the killing of a false prophet without a trial.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: Volume 1* (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 419

But Jesus is not a false prophet; all He did was preach His first sermon in Nazareth, which convicted them of the truth.

Augustine wrote 1600 years ago what remains the truth of the human heart: we love the truth when it encourages us, but hate the truth when it accuses us.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Luke: Be Compassionate* (Victor Books, 1989), p. 46

And they rushed forward in their rage to kill Him. How's that for your first sermon?

If you taught your first lesson to 3rd graders and afterward, they wanted to throw you off a cliff, you would probably find a different ministry.

But what does Jesus do now?

**We're told here in the next verse—
verse 30:**

*But passing through their
midst, he went away.*

Luke 4:30

When you're ridiculed for your faith; when you're rejected because you follow Christ; when you suffer injustice and ridicule and demotion, here's how to respond like Christ.

The Lord here gives us a model on how to respond to rejection.

First, don't lose control.

Notice again, "passing through their midst..."

We're not told if this was miraculous, there isn't any evidence that He disappeared. The verb simply means **to walk through**.

He more than likely simply revealed such impressive dignity and control that they were silenced—perhaps even shamed—by their furious eruption.

But if I were the Lord, I would change, "He passed through their midst" to "He turned them into mist."

That's my kind of translation.

But the Lord didn't lose control, like they had. He didn't strike back. He didn't lash out; no, here's the model: don't lose control.

Second, don't lose heart.

Listen, as the Son of God, He would be unmoved by their rejection and mistreatment; but as a man, which he was, he was just rejected in his very hometown.

These were his friends and former clients, his extended family. Can you imagine this scene taking place in front of your mother and half-brothers and sisters, and your religious leaders?

Your former friends and colleagues are now enraged, wanting nothing more than to kill you.

How's that for your first sermon back home in Nazareth?

If you asked Jesus later, "I heard you preached in your hometown and the synagogue was packed, did anybody respond?" I guess He could have answered, "Yeah, they all responded, they all came forward; they ran down the aisle and then took me out to get rid of me."

Adapted from Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 98

Oh, this hurt! But it's possible to be hurt, and not lose heart. And we know that because Jesus is going to continue moving forward in obedience to His Father's will.

And that leads me to my final response to rejection:

Third, don't lose sight.

Notice again:

But passing through their midst, he went away.

Luke 4:30

The verb *He went away* means that that He pursued the journey which He had begun; in fact, the tense of the verb means that He kept on going.

Adapted from Swindoll, p. 111

Just a few verses later, Jesus will announce,

"I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose."

Luke 4:43b



What part of Jesus' example of responding to rejection can you implement into your life today?

He didn't lose control

He didn't lose heart

He didn't lose sight.

This is how He responded to rejection.

What an important example He is to us today, especially in light of the growing hostility of our culture and a deepening distaste to hearing the word of God.

Perhaps you're facing rejection from classmates or colleagues, or have a spouse who doesn't appreciate your love for Christ, or a family member or colleague has become belligerent whenever you mention the Lord's name:

Let's make sure that *we do not lose control* of our own emotions.

Let's *not lose heart* as we love and follow the One whom the world has rejected to this day.

Let's not lose sight that the most important thing we have to offer to our world is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The truth that He is the Messiah who can forgive them, and cleanse them and set them free.