

**The Cost of Rebellion**  
**January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2016**

**Luke 4:20-32**  
**Epiphany 4 C**

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Last week, we saw Jesus at the start of his earthly ministry. Anointed by the Spirit at his baptism, he sets out through the Galilean countryside and starts teaching the Jews the truth about the salvation he has come to bring. He visits the synagogues and shows them from God's word how he has come to fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah and that he is in fact the one they have been waiting for since the first promise to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

In particular, last time we saw Jesus return to his hometown of Nazareth and repeat this pattern. On the Sabbath he came forward to teach in the synagogue. He read from the scroll of Isaiah, a promise that he was the one anointed to announce freedom from prison, sight for the blind, relief for the poor and oppressed. All the good news of God, freely given, offered up without cost to any who would take it. This was meant to be a revelation to the people of the time. They had lived under the system of God's law of Moses until now. The law was strict, long and complicated. There was too much to know and too much to do. The point was to drive a person to despair of ever doing it fully. It was there to drive home the point that you can't please God on your own. To realize that you were poor and lost and miserable on your own.

And to this condition, Jesus came and promised release, riches and freedom. He was there to bless them freely and to relieve the burden that the Law had laid on them. He was there to just give to them absolutely everything they could ever need or desire. As we said last time, he was there to fulfill them. To make them complete. And free. Everything they need, everything they could really want and without charge, without cost. He was just there to hand it to them. And then we see how the people respond to this offer.

At first it seems positive. After all, he spoke with his own authority about these truths, unlike their usual rabbis. And the message he brought was something new to them. It wasn't about how to make God happy with them by keeping the laws right. It was about simply what God wanted to do for them. It was an amazing message, it was life-changing, it was the only thing they really needed to hear. It was everything.

And then their human nature got in the way.

"Hey wait a minute. Don't we know this guy? Isn't this Joseph's son? That little kid who used to run through the streets with his buddies? Yeah that little guy. He grew up with us here. So how can he be anything special?" That which they've seen and experienced with their human eyes gets in the way. The truth of God before them, of God's word spoken to them is intercepted by pride. That this man they knew as a little boy could be more important than them, or know some truth that they don't.

Jesus knows their hearts. He knows the conflict going on in their hearts and he knows that they have already started to look down on him because of their sinful pride. Jesus does not mince words. He calls them out on their sinful thinking and confronts it head-on. And he presents them with a harsh warning out of Israel's history. During the days of Elijah and his successor Elisha, the people of Israel, you know, God's chosen, they had largely rejected God and his word. These prophets tried to bring the truth back to the land and they were ignored just the same. The Jews thought they were special. Then why did God send Elijah to a widow in another country to feed and be fed? Why did Elisha heal a foreigner but none of his own people? Jesus, in essence is saying, your ancestors rejected God and so God rejected them, get the picture? Don't make the same mistake!

And here, now the people have a choice. Their identity, their pride, is wrapped up in their national identity as God's chosen people. To suggest that God could move on, that God could show preferential treatment to anyone else... well! Doesn't matter that it's true. Doesn't matter that it's actually written in the word of their own God. It's an intolerable insult! So, do you bury your pride and accept the truth that Jesus is speaking? And not just the truth but the amazing blessings he is promising? The freedom, the release, the riches! It's either the blessings of God...or your pride. In short, will they accept God on the terms he offers...or will they rebel to try their own way? Anything that is not according to God's will and ways is rebellion.

We see what happened. They didn't even think about it. They were furious. Their own pride came first without a second thought. They rushed at Jesus, drove him to the edge of town and prepared to throw him down the cliff side. They chose to fight against God. They didn't like what God had to say. They didn't like how his messenger delivered it. And so despite the fact that it was true, despite what God was offering them, they chose to rise up against God.

Without even reading the rest of the account, you and I could already tell them that this would end badly. It's a stupid, stupid choice. But that's the thing about the sinful nature. It is utterly irrational. It cannot be reasoned with. Nobody rational would tell you that your pride is worth eternity in hell. But every single person who rejects God makes exactly that choice. Here Jesus is merciful for now. He simply leaves. He gives them more time to possibly repent and have him as their savior. It probably won't happen, but he mercifully grants that time anyway. They chose their pride over salvation, over their God. And as long as they continued in that choice, they would be denied heaven, they would suffer forever for their sins.

This is the cost of rebellion against God. It can never succeed, it is never worth it. Rationally we can look at these facts and say, "Well, of course. Why would I ever rebel against God? He is in control, he has everything I need and I could never win against him anyway. There is no rational reason to do otherwise!"

We can say that. We can sit here and think that. But how do we respond when we're confronted with the same stumbling blocks that the Jews faced here? We say these things when we don't have to sacrifice our pride to do so. When we can still think we're good people and trust in the Lord to save us at the same time. But what about when his messenger isn't someone we approve of? Or let's be real specific here; what about when the Pastor God has put over me is a kid half my age? Who's this guy to tell me how to live my life or how to understand God's word? Who's he to suggest I'm sinning and need to repent. And what's more, I know he's made mistakes. He's not perfect, he's failed in some pretty big ways, so how can I really trust anything he says?

\*Gasp\* You mean the human being that God has asked to speak his word to you is also a sinner like you? How about that? But does that change the honor due to him by right of his office? Not because he's sinless, but because of the office entrusted to him. Same way God asks us to honor our parents and others in authority. That does not change our obligation to listen when he speaks the Word to us. Because despite the sinful vessel, it is still God's word that is proclaimed and if we refuse to listen, it is God we are rebelling against.

Or what about if he insults my pride? What about if he makes a callous remark or suggests that I'm less than perfect? How many times have we heard someone left a church because they didn't like something the pastor did or said? Because it offended them. That should never have to happen. Either what happened was a sin, in which case it should be addressed so there can be repentance and forgiveness, or the pastor was speaking the truth and it is our own pride that needs to be put aside. Either way, whether sin or truth, there is no reason any set of believers cannot move forward as brothers and sisters when we are founded on the bedrock of God's word and lay hold of the forgiveness he offers.

But you know what? This is all a rational argument. And what is the problem? The part that leads us to rebel is thoroughly irrational. That old sinful nature doesn't care if it makes no sense, it'll put the self before God's word any day no matter how it comes to us. The only way to fight this, the only way to fight this urge to rebel within us is to surround ourselves, to fill ourselves with the only power that can overcome our old nature; the power of the Holy Spirit brought to us through the Word of God itself. Only by immersing ourselves in what God has to say to us will we drown that old nature right out and hear the voice of our Savior calling wherever we hear it. Only through God's power will we be drawn to him and want to hear what he tells us rather than hold foolishly on to our pride.

And the blessings, as always, are worth it. The treasures that our Lord offers through Jesus both for now and for eternity do not disappoint. The peace of a God who willingly went to die for you will sustain you through all troubles now and to come. Jesus who walked away from the mob of Nazareth chose not to walk away from the Roman soldiers so that you could be saved by his sacrifice. He died that you can live. He gave up his pride for your life. And if he loves you enough to do that, he loves you enough to carry you through the rest of this life to him. Listen when he speaks, however it comes to you, and you will be blessed through him. Amen.