

I've been watching the Ken Burns documentary on the Civil War. And this last week, I saw the episode that discussed the speech Lincoln gave at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. You might know that speech better as the Gettysburg address. You're familiar with it, right? “Four score and seven years ago...” It's one of the most famous speeches in American history.

Now. But did you know that first reactions to Lincoln's speech weren't all that positive? Many were disappointed - offended, even. A good speech in those days lasted for at least an hour. Lincoln's? It lasted two minutes. Hardly enough to mark the momentous occasion. Not to mention that Lincoln was sick when he gave it, so his face was “sad and serious and ashen gray,” one witness observed. It wasn't an impressive delivery. When he finished, there was silence, and then a few awkward, scattered claps. The story goes that Lincoln himself turned to an aide afterward and said, “That speech...was a flat failure.” Before long, though, people's reaction changed, and now that flat failure is cherished as a national treasure.

Something similar happened with Jesus' speech in his hometown synagogue of Nazareth, only in reverse order. It was shorter than the Gettysburg address. Jesus read a prophecy about Israel's Savior and proclaimed that he was the fulfillment. And at first, people's reaction was positive. They were gushing about what he said. But in a matter of moments, public opinion soured. In a matter of moments, people became so offended by what Jesus said that they formed an angry mob and tried to kill him.

It's shocking, at first. How could that happen? How could they do that? These are the people he grew up with. And the hands that patted him on the head as a boy are now trying to push him off a cliff?

But the closer we look, the better we'll see that we have more in common with those synagogue-goers than we might like to admit. As we study their reaction to Jesus' words that day, God would have us examine our reaction to his words today. Wrestle with this question: Does Jesus offend you?

**<sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, <sup>21</sup> and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”**

**<sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn't this Joseph's son?” they asked.**

**<sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, “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.’”**

**<sup>24</sup> “I tell you the truth,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. <sup>27</sup> And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”**

**<sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.**

**<sup>31</sup> Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people. <sup>32</sup> They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.**

So we pick up where we left off last week. The scroll Jesus had just read from is Isaiah's, but the words he read were about the promised Savior: "Spirit of the Lord is on me to preach good news to the poor." Then Jesus sits down and says, "**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

And the people got it. Jesus just called himself our Savior. And their initial reaction seems good, doesn't it? **All spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words.** What a sermon, they said! What good news! The Messiah had come! And who would have thought, he'd be none other than Nazareth's own – old Joseph's boy! "**Isn't this Joseph's son?**" **they asked.**

But right there was their first cause for offense. "Wait a minute. Yeah, this is just Joseph's son. I remember him as a kid playing in our streets. He used to help out in his dad's shop. In fact, his brothers and sisters still live here. We know him. Just an ordinary kid from an ordinary family. Couldn't possibly be the Savior." Their familiarity with Jesus...his outward ordinariness...became a stumbling block for them. Led them to close ears and hearts to God's message.

But couldn't the same be said of us? Jesus still comes to us in outwardly ordinary ways. He comes through words. Words with bread and wine. He comes, like in Nazareth, with the best of news! But doesn't the outward plainness of it all offend our sinful flesh? Sometimes cause us to stumble? Nothing flashy about it, so a part of us sees listening as more of a chore or a bore. Nothing flashy about it, so our minds and hearts easily wander even while were in it – listening but not really listening. Leaves us closing our ears or hearts to God's message.

And the same could be said of our familiarity with Jesus. Like the people in Nazareth, many of us know Jesus well. Known him for years. And our sinful nature stumbles over that blessing, too, doesn't it? "Then, why is it so important to get to know him better?" And word becomes optional. And good news becomes old news and we yawn when we hear it. Do you remember the first time you took Lord's Supper – trembling at the wonder of it all? Do you still? Or has familiarity bred contempt, like it did in Nazareth?

But Jesus wasn't done offending the people that day. He could read what was in their hearts. He says to them, "**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.'**" That proverb means, "Prove it." The people were thinking, "Messiah? Nah...prove it! We heard you did miracles in Capernaum...don't your hometown people deserve at least the same?"

So Jesus called them out on their unbelief. He did it with two history lessons. During the days of Elijah and Elisha, God's people were worshiping Baal and turning a deaf ear to God's prophets. So God sent them elsewhere, to people who would listen. To a widow in Sidon. To a

Syrian named Naaman. It was a loving warning, wasn't it? If Nazareth refused to listen, the same would happen to them.

But, oh, how it offended their pride. Jesus said their status as his neighbors earned them no special favors from him. Said these good church-goers were no better than their Baal-worshipping ancestors. He even compared these Jews, God's chosen people, to two Gentiles – and unfavorably so! At least they listened to God's messengers! “How dare he?”

But doesn't Jesus offend our pride, too? Isn't that why, when we get called to account for a sin in our life, our knee-jerk reaction is sometimes anger? All those things that make our chests stick out a bit –you've been a Christian all your life, you know right doctrine – none of it earns you any special treatment from him. When he says that on our own, these good church-goers are no better in God's eyes than the abortion doctor, child molester, prostitute. Isn't there a part of us so offended by that we want to cover our ears and shut Jesus up, too?

So the crowd formed a mob and brought him to a hill on the edge of town and try to throw him off. The irony of it all is that they got their miracle, although they probably didn't notice it. Jesus slips right out of the hands that are holding him, right past the crowds trying to kill him, and all unnoticed, goes on his way.

It seems like there isn't much good news in these verses. It's an unhappy story with an unhappy ending. But think about this for a second: Jesus still went to his hometown to preach. He knew that he'd be painfully rejected by them, but he still went, because their salvation mattered that much to him. He knew his message would offend them, but he said it anyway, because it was the only message that would save them. And isn't that a glimpse of the same saving love Jesus has shown to you and to me?

God knew that all mankind's sinful, default mode is rejecting him. He knew before he came into this world that he'd come to his own, and his own wouldn't receive him. All the ways you and I would turn a deaf ear to him. But he still came as one of us. He came because our salvation mattered that much to him. In fact, it mattered so much to him that he was willing to suffer a rejection far more painful than the one he experienced in Nazareth that day to win it.

See, Jesus used his power to slip away from the crowd miraculously, because that hill on that day wasn't when and where he was to die. When that day came, Jesus didn't slip away. He went with the crowds that arrested him. Went with his cross to another hill. Went carrying your sins and my sins and the sins of Nazareth. There he suffered God's rejection that our sins deserved, to win your forgiveness.

But until then, Luke says, he didn't stop preaching. <sup>31</sup> **Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath began to teach the people.** <sup>32</sup> **They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.** There aren't any hills here in Houston, but I think if you tried to throw me off one, that'd about do it for me. Not Jesus. He didn't stop preaching. Even when people rejected him, he kept on preaching. Paul describes it so beautifully in our second lesson. God says, **“All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people.”** He even kept holding out his hands to the people of Nazareth, because he'd left them with two precious gifts: The good news, ringing in their ears, and time to repent and believe it. So Jesus kept on preaching God's love and forgiveness. He held out his hands in

Capernaum when he preached there. He held out his hands with the message of sin and grace all over Galilee and Judea.

Hasn't stopped preaching to you, either. Held out his hands, all these years, even when you tried to push him away, held you close through his word. Doing the same this morning. Does the same every time you hear his word and his supper.

He won't stop offending you. It'll be the same message you've heard all your life. Thank God it doesn't change! It's the only message that saves. He won't use means more flashy – it'll be words, and words with water or bread and wine. But don't stop listening! That's your Savior, holding his arms out to you again, to hold you close to him in faith. And he won't fail to offend your pride by showing you your sins. But don't stop listening! He only empties you of yourself to fill you up with his forgiveness and his love. Don't stop listening – hear him every time as if it were the first. And God grant that the more you come to know it, the more you come to love it. Amen.