**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**THE REJECTED SAVIOUR**

**Luke 4:14-30**

**INTRODUCTION**

Please open your Bibles to Luke 4. Today we continue our series called “The Gospel of Luke: Finding Certainty in a World of Doubt.” Last Sunday, we saw Jesus being tempted in the wilderness by the devil. Jesus triumphed over every temptation through the power of the Spirit, and he triumphed as our representative. His victory over Satan is credited to us, as if we ourselves had triumphed over the devil’s temptations. Now, with his identity as the Son of God and the Saviour of mankind confirmed, Jesus is ready to unveil himself to the world in our text today.

I don’t watch a lot of movies, but there is one brand of movie that I almost always go out of my way to watch: superhero movies. When people are asked what their favourite superhero movie of the last 10 years has been, many will say that it was Christopher Nolan’s *Dark Knight*.

In the *Dark Knight*, HarveyDent is the District Attorney of Gotham city who is responsible for implementing a “law and order” agenda. He is, in many respects, an admirable figure. He cares for people, sacrifices himself, and isn’t after his own political ambitions. He is a true “White Knight” who many believed would save the city. He succeeds in putting hundreds of goons and criminals in jail. But sadly, during one of the Joker’s manipulative social experiments, his fiancée is murdered, and he suffers gruesome burns to his face.

This leaves Dent, now known as “Two-Face”, to seek revenge. He kills people and kidnaps people, and his murderous rampage culminates in the kidnapping of Commissioner Gordon’s family. Batman intervenes and tries to reason with Dent, but it doesn’t work. Finally, in order to protect Gordon’s family, Batman tackles Dent off a high ledge, leading Dent to fall to his death.

This leads us to the most fascinating part of the film. Batman and Commissioner Gordon know that all the good Dent did would be undone if the public became aware of Dent’s corruption. The hundreds of prosecutions he oversaw would fail, and the city would lose hope in its “White Knight”. And so, Batman does something more heroic than all the other heroic acts in the film: he volunteers to take the blame for Dent’s crimes on himself. Batman knows that he’s not the hero Gotham City needed at the time, for they had never come to embrace him. Dent was the hero the city needed. Therefore, Batman instructs Commissioner Gordon to tell the public that he was responsible for all of Dent’s crimes, so that the public would continue to believe that Dent was an honourable and just man. Commissioner Gordon reluctantly agrees to this plan, and the movie ends with Batman being chased by scores of police officers. Batman, Gotham’s true “White Knight”, had become the “Dark Knight”, as he continued to protect the very city that hated him.

Nothing in the film is more powerful than this theme of “the Rejected Saviour”. Batman is the true saviour of Gotham City, and he deserves to be honoured and thanked as such. But instead of receiving honour and thanksgiving, he is chased like a criminal out of the city.

Our text today points us to another Rejected Saviour. He came to bring freedom to the oppressed, liberty to the captives, and sight to the blind. He is a saviour who came both to proclaim a message of good news, and to do what was necessary to make sure the good news was fulfilled. But rather than honour him and give thanks to him, the world would reject him.

The title of this message is **The Rejected Saviour**. My aim today is to show you that **The Rejection of Jesus Saves us From the Rejection of God**. We will have three points today:

1. Jesus the Anointed One
2. Jesus the Saving One
3. Jesus the Rejected One

(1) **JESUS THE ANOINTED ONE**

Our text today begins in 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.” Jesus had just defeated the devil by the power of the Holy Spirit in him, and now he returns to Galilee, the region where he grew up, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

News spreads quickly about this young man named Jesus, not so much because of what he did, but because of what he taught. Verse 15 says, “And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified by all.” There was something powerful about his teaching that captivated people’s attention, that made them talk about him, that compelled them to listen to him. And the reason why his teaching was so powerful was because the power of the Holy Spirit was working in and through him. This is a key truth that we will return to.

Luke now zooms in on one of these instances of Jesus’ teaching in 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.” A synagogue service was not that different from a contemporary church service. It would include some Scriptural recitations, a time of prayer, one or two Scripture readings, and a sermon, which could be given by any man in the congregation.

This is precisely what is happening in verses 16-17. Jesus has volunteered to read Scripture. He chooses a text from Isaiah 61 to read to the congregation, and having read it, verse 20 says this: “And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogues were fixed on him.” This was the moment everyone had been waiting for. The reading was complete, and now it was time for Jesus’ sermon. The people had heard of Jesus’ powerful preaching and wanted to hear it themselves.

I’m sure it was an amazing sermon, but sadly, all we get is the main point, summarized in verse 21: “And he began to say to them, ‘Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.’” That’s all we really need to understand the heart of Jesus’ sermon. Jesus is saying that the Anointed One, prophesied in Isaiah 61, has arrived. Jesus is the Anointed One who has come to bring healing and deliverance to the poor and the captives. To be anointed was to be consecrated, or set apart, for service to God, symbolized by the pouring of oil on the person or thing being consecrated. The concept of an “Anointed *One*” – that is, a special, consecrated individual – came from texts like Isaiah 61. This is where the Hebrew term “Messiah” comes from, translated as “Christ” in Greek. Both literally mean “Anointed One”. The Jewish people understood Isaiah 61 to mean that God had promised to send a powerful figure to save them once and for all.

And so, in this sermon preached in his hometown, Jesus chose to preach about himself. He chose to announce that he was no longer to be known as Jesus of Nazareth. Now, he was to be known as Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, for he had been set apart not just by the anointing of oil, but by the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

But what is Jesus anointed with the Spirit for? What difference does the power of the Spirit make in his life? We know from other passages of Scripture that the Holy Spirit does many things in the life of a Christian. The Spirit comforts us. The Spirit counsels us. The Spirit gives us assurance that we are the children of God. The Spirit gives us gifts to serve others. I have no doubt that the Spirit did all these things in Jesus’ life as well. But our text focuses on something else. It shows us that the Holy Spirit makes a difference in the power of Jesus’ *words*.

We already saw this in verses 14-15, where Luke says that the main way that the Spirit’s power was manifested in Jesus’ life was through his teaching. The Holy Spirit showed himself to be present in Jesus’ life through the words that he spoke, and through the effect that those words had on other people. Now, we see this emphasis on Jesus’ words again in verses 18-19: “he has anointed me to *proclaim* good news to the poor”; “he has sent me to *proclaim* liberty to the captives; and he has sent me “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” Jesus was anointed with the Spirit, in order that the words he spoke as he taught might go forth with power.

We need the Holy Spirit to do the same in our lives. We know that the Holy Spirit dwells inside everyone who has been born again through faith in Christ. The Spirit is a permanent part of every Christian’s life. But the Spirit also *fills* us with his power at various times in our lives. We have the Spirit, but we also need to seek to be filled with the Spirit, especially if we are to speak to others about the person and work of Christ. Let me give you two reasons why this is necessary:

First, we need the Spirit to give us spiritual wisdom to understand spiritual truths. 1 Corinthians 2:12 says this:

Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.

This verse isn’t just talking about intellectual understanding. It’s talking about understanding with faith. Anyone can intellectually understand the gospel. But not everyone can understand and believe. If you believe the gospel, it’s because the Spirit has illuminated your heart to believe the gospel.

But though we believe the gospel, we will often go through seasons when we doubt different aspects of the gospel. Perhaps you’ve had a time in your life when you’ve known in your mind that the Bible teaches that God loves you and has forgiven you in Christ, but you’ve struggled with believing that it’s true. You need faith. On one level, faith comes from our choice to believe that the gospel is true. But on a deeper level, faith comes from the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us faith, and faith gives us the desire to want to speak the gospel to others.

But though we have the desire to speak the gospel to others, we don’t always have the boldness. And so, the second way we need the Spirit is the Spirit gives us boldness to speak the gospel to others. I think all of us have had times when we felt like we squandered good opportunities to share the gospel with others. Perhaps a non-Christian friend shares how meaningless life is with us. We want to give them the hope of the gospel, but we don’t, because we’re afraid of what they’ll think of us. Or say a Christian friend shares his or her struggle with sin with you. You know that you need to point them to Christ – to his grace, to his forgiveness, and to his sanctifying power – but you don’t, because you don’t feel spiritually mature enough to counsel others.

These are the times when we need the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gives us a boldness that we lack when we are left to our own abilities. He gives us the power to speak when we feel powerless to summon the right words. We see this happening in Acts 4, where the early church was tempted to stop speaking the gospel as it began to face persecution for the first time. The church responded by praying for boldness, and this is what happened:

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31)

Of course, when we find ourselves doubting God’s word, or when we find ourselves paralyzed by fear when it comes to speaking God’s word, we need to persevere in faith whether we are filled with the Spirit or not. We need to believe what is right and do what is right even when it’s hard, exerting all our willpower to that end. But at the same time, we need to be constantly seeking God in prayer, asking that he would fill us with the Spirit. We can do this before a coffee date with our unbelieving friend. We can do this before we arrive at church on Sundays. We can do this in the middle of a hard conversation. Let us daily pray for the filling of the Spirit, that we may believe and proclaim the truths of the gospel.

(2) **JESUS THE SAVING ONE**

Jesus is the Anointed One who was filled with the Spirit to speak spiritual truths. But what were these truths that he spoke, and that we must speak as well? This leads us to our second point: Jesus the Saving One.

Jesus’ message is described in five ways in verses 18-19: it is a message of “good news to the poor”; it is “liberty to the captives”; it is “recovering of sight to the blind”; it is a message that will “set at liberty those who are oppressed”, and it is a message that proclaims “the year of the Lord’s favour.”

There are some who interpret these verses to say that the heart of Jesus’ ministry was social renewal. I’ll call this the “literal interpretation”. Some would interpret these verses literally and say that Jesus came only to care for those who are materially poor, physically disabled, and unjustly held captive. According to this interpretation, Jesus isn’t thinking about the oppression of Satan, but the oppression of slavery and sex trafficking. He’s not thinking about the poor in spirit, but about the poor in possessions. Jesus is not so much a spiritual saviour as he is a political revolutionary.

If that’s the correct interpretation, then all of us need to conclude that Jesus didn’t come for us. None of us are poor by the world’s standards. None of us are blind. None of us are being held captive against our will. If these verses are read literally, then Jesus’ message of liberty and freedom isn’t for us. It’s for others. Yes, Jesus is a saviour, but he is only a selective saviour. If you’re poor or oppressed, you’re in luck! Jesus has come to save you. But if you’re not, then too bad. Jesus isn’t your saviour. He’s only your example. You must save people just as he saved people, so that the world can become a better place.

But are we to read these verses literally? Verse 19 already hints that they shouldn’t be. Jesus says in verse 19 that he has come “to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.” This refers to the “Jubilee year” in Leviticus 25, a year that only came once every 50 years. During the Jubilee year, every single debt was forgiven. Some would have sold their family land because of debt. That land would be returned to them. Others would have sold themselves into slavery because of debt. They would be freed from slavery. The year of Jubilee was a year of forgiveness, a time when all debts were forgiven.

Is this what Jesus came to do, to announce that everyone’s financial debts were to be forgiven? Of course not. Jesus will speak about the forgiveness of financial debts, but only as a metaphor for a greater forgiveness: the forgiveness of our sins. This is the first indication that these verses aren’t to be read literally.

Let me give you another, more significant reason for why we shouldn’t adopt the literal interpretation by looking at how Jesus used the word “poor”. In Luke 6, Jesus blesses the poor, declaring that “yours is the kingdom of God.” If we were to use the literal interpretation, then it would seem that Jesus is again promising the materially poor that they will materially prosper. But just a few verses later, he says this about “the poor”:

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.” (Luke 6:22-23).

I want you to notice two things about these verses: his description of the poor, and his description of how he will comfort the poor. He describes the poor here as those who are excluded and persecuted for following him. It is a poverty that comes from being marginalized, labelled, and condemned by the people around us. This isn’t materialistic poverty. It is social poverty. And how does Jesus comfort the poor? By promising them not worldly wealth, but heavenly reward: the heavenly reward of finding boundless joy and satisfaction from an eternal relationship with God himself.

Therefore, when Jesus speaks of the poor, he’s not just speaking of the materially poor. He’s speaking about anyone who lacks what makes human beings happy, whether it be material needs, relationships, or meaning in life. We use the word in the same way. We say that people who have all the possessions in the world but have no meaningful relationships are poorer than the loving family that just barely gets by.

There will come a time in the lives of those who follow Christ when all of us will suffer social poverty. I remember how friendly everyone was to me while I was attending law school – that is, until they found out I was an evangelical Christian. I must admit that law school was, by and large, a lonely experience, and I suffered a social poverty that was difficult to bear.

How have you suffered social poverty for the sake of Christ? Perhaps you really wanted to start a relationship with someone you really liked, but you had to say “no” because the person wasn’t a Christian. Or perhaps you started a new job and wanted to make a good impression on your co-workers, but as soon as you start trying to share the gospel with them, you’re labelled as a right-wing fundamentalist. It hurts, doesn’t it? It hurts when people don’t even give you a chance. It hurts to say “no” to meaningful relationships. This kind of hurt makes us feel poor. It makes us feel like we lack something that was meant to make us happy.

Jesus’ use of the word “poor” in Luke 6 shows us that, when Jesus speaks of “the poor” in verse 18, he’s not just speaking about material poverty. He’s speaking about all who are aware of a deep need for something they don’t yet have. That’s how Jesus speaks of the poor. And though we do not have time to do a similar study of the other terms, be assured that we can speak of the other terms – “captive”, “blind”, and “oppressed” – in similar fashion.

We are captive to the enslaving power of sin, but Jesus has come to free us from that captivity. We are blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ, but Jesus has come to give us spiritual eyes to see him as our greatest treasure. We are oppressed by the devil, but Jesus has come to release us from his condemnation and power. And we are poor, but Jesus has come to comfort us by fulfilling all our deepest needs in him.

Jesus, the Anointed One, is also the Saving One. He is full of the Spirit in order to bring us fullness of life in him. But only those who know their needs will have their needs met in him. Those who refuse to acknowledge their needs because they’re self-sufficient will not receive his promised salvation. Those who refuse to come to him because they’re too proud will not receive it either. They will hear the good news, but they won’t receive the good news. Only those who are broken, blind, oppressed, and poor can receive the freedom that Jesus has come to bring to the world.

(3) **JESUS THE REJECTED ONE**

As we move on in our text, we will see that Jesus’ audience in Nazareth wasn’t prepared to receive the good news that Jesus had come to proclaim. They rejected the message, and in so doing, they rejected Jesus. This leads to our last point: Jesus the Rejected One.

The initial response to Jesus’ sermon seems to have been largely favourable. We see that in verse 22: “And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.” The synagogue crowd was not disappointed by Jesus. His rhetorical skills and the graciousness of his message left them thoroughly impressed. They were familiar with the famous Messianic prophecy from Isaiah 61, and they longed for it to be fulfilled. Hearing Jesus say it was fulfilled in their hearing would have pleased them. But as we will see, their expectation of Isaiah 61’s fulfillment was very different from how Jesus would actually fulfill it.

We see the first hints of their doubt at the end of verse 22, as the crowd wondered, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” Though they marveled at Jesus’ preaching skills and the power of his message, they wondered whether the fulfillment of such a great prophecy could come through one of their own. As one commentator put it, the crowd wondered,

“How could a common man’s son make such claims? Familiarity breeds contempt.” (Bock, p. 415)

Jesus knows, however, that this hint of doubt was only a symptom of a deeper problem. Jesus says in verse 23, “Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, ‘Physician, heal yourself.’ What we have heard you did at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” Jesus knows that their doubts run so deep that they will soon grow tired of his preaching and begin to demand miracles. Jesus had apparently done miraculous things in Capernaum, and now the people of his hometown wanted to see the same things. “Physician, heal yourself!” means “Do at home what you have done elsewhere!”

But even if he did miracles, they still would not accept him, for as Jesus says in verse 24, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown.” Like the prophets of old, Jesus would be rejected by his people, not because his teaching lacked power, and not because he was unable to do miracles, but simply because he was familiar to them. This hometown boy would only ever be a hometown boy in their eyes. He may make a name for himself out there in the world, but back at home, he would always be an ordinary joe to his neighbours and acquaintances.

Jesus now warns them of the consequences of treating him like an ordinary joe in verses 25-27. He gives them two illustrations from biblical history of what will happen to them if they do not receive his words as the very words of God. The first illustration is in verses 25-26: “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.” Jesus’ point is that God could have sent Elijah to miraculously provide for thousands of widows in Israel during a great famine, but he chose not to. Instead, God sent Elijah to a Gentile widow in a Gentile town.

The second illustration in verse 27 is much like the first: “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.” Naaman, like the widow from Zarephath, was a Gentile, a non-Jew, and therefore not part of God’s covenant people. But rather than send the prophet Elisha to heal Jewish lepers, God sent Elisha to heal Naaman.

The point of both illustrations is this: reject the prophet, and God, through his prophet, will reject you. If God’s people do not accept the prophet’s words as God’s words, then God will make a new people for himself by sending his prophet to speak his words to those outside of Israel.

This would have been deeply offensive to Jesus’ audience. They believed that they were God’s people to the exclusion of everyone else. God’s promises were made to Israel, and Israel alone. And the most important promise, the promise in Isaiah 61 of the Anointed One, was made exclusively for Israel’s benefit. They thought that “the poor”, the “captives”, the “oppressed”, referred only to them, and that the promised deliverance belonged only to them.

Therefore, when Jesus said that God was sending him to proclaim freedom and liberty to the non-Jewish people of the world, they were outraged. Jesus was contradicting everything they had come to believe about their identity as God’s chosen people, and everything they had come to believe about the Messiah. And so, verses 28-29 tell us that “all in the synagogue were filled with wrath”. They walked him to the brow of a hill so that they could murder him by throwing him off the edge. The Anointed One had become the Rejected One.

But though they desired to kill him, they couldn’t kill him, for his life was not theirs to take. Verse 30 says that Jesus passed through their midst, and he went away. Only one could take Jesus’ life, and that was Jesus himself. As Jesus would say in John 10:18:

 “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.”

That is what Jesus would do, on another hill called Calvary. Jesus, out of his love for sinners like you and me, would lay down his life for our sins, dying in our place on the cross, so that we could be saved from the penalty and power of our sin.

**CONCLUSION**

The theme of a rejected saviour is often seen as a tragedy. When a hero lays down his life for the good of others, but is despised and rejected for it, we cry out against the injustice. The rejection of Jesus is no different. All of us, left to our own sin, will reject Jesus. We are the Jews in the synagogue, angrily marching Jesus down the hill to be murdered. We are the mockers at Calvary, laughing at Jesus as he slowly dies on the cross. Their sin is a picture of our sin, of how all of us have responded to God and to his Anointed One.

But the amazing thing about Jesus’ rejection is that it does not end as a tragedy. It ends in hope. It is through our rejection of Jesus that he saves us. Jesus was rejected at Nazareth, and he was rejected at Calvary, but he willingly bore that rejection so that we would not be rejected by God. Through his death, he now offers us reconciliation with God. And as we enter into a relationship with God, he satisfies the poverty of our hearts. This is the good news that he has come to bring to the poor, that the blind may finally see, and that the captive may finally be free.