

Sermon: *Hearing God's Word*
Text: *Luke 4:21 – 30*
Date: *January 31, 2010 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Johnny Brantley was nothing but trouble. When he was nine, his daddy died and after that, he took out all his grief and pain, all his frustrations and anger, on anyone or anything that got in his way. And finally, it got so bad that the school board kicked him out and then, he became a police problem. And when the family moved away and the whole town breathed a sigh of relief. Then, one day, the District Superintendent called to say First Church was getting a new pastor and everybody was happy ... until they heard his name ... Johnny Brantley.

Now, I know there are several examples in the area of pastors who grew up here and serve here, but most of the time it just doesn't work. It didn't even work for Jesus. After traveling around Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and healing the sick, Jesus went home to Nazareth and on the Sabbath, He went to the synagogue and read from Isaiah: *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me for He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."* And then, He said: *"Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

Now, at first, everybody was excited; the hometown boy had made good. But then, the tide turned and Jesus knew something had changed. He said: *"Do doubt you are going to quote me a proverb, 'Doctor, heal yourself,' and you are going to want me to do*

here what I've done in Capernaum. I know that no prophet is without honor except in His hometown."

And then, He reminded them of two stories from their past, how during a time of famine, God had sent Elijah to a widow in Zaraphath of Sidon, and how God had used Elisha to heal a Syrian General named Naaman of leprosy. And the people got so mad that they rushed Him and forced Him down the streets to the edge of a cliff. And they intended to throw Him off and stone Him, but suddenly, He stopped and walked through the crowd and left Nazareth forever.

Friends, what is it that stops us from hearing God's Word? You know, Jesus told a parable about a wise man who built his house upon a rock, who listened to His Word and built his life upon the solid foundation. And He said: **"Those who hear my words and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock."** And we know that; and yet, many times, we fail to receive God's Word and assimilate it into our lives. Why?

First, there is the problem of familiarity! When Jesus attempted to preach, all they could think about was: **"Isn't this Joseph's boy?"** You see, they all knew Him. They had watched Him grow up down the street. He had played with their kids; He worked in His daddy's shop. They knew His brothers and sisters. And they had a preconceived idea about Him that stopped them from hearing the message about the Kingdom. *"This couldn't be the Messiah; this is just Joseph's boy."*

You know, if we're not careful, we can make the same mistake. Every time we come before God's

Word – when we read it, when we study it, when we hear it – God speaks! But we can become so familiar with the stories and with our understanding of who God is and what God does that we no longer hear God speak. The writer of Hebrews said: “*God’s Word is alive and active, sharper than any two edge sword*” and just when you think you’ve got it all figured out, it will cut you to the heart.

It’s the problem of familiarity.

Second, there’s the problem of unrealistic expectations. The Jewish people had very high expectations of their Messiah. They knew what a Messiah would look like and what a Messiah would do and Jesus just didn’t add up. He wasn’t a military leader; He wasn’t preaching political overthrow. Instead, He talked about preaching to the poor, the oppressed, and the marginalized. This isn’t what they expected.

I saw an interesting cartoon of a fourth-grade boy standing toe to toe and nose to nose with his teacher. Behind them was a blackboard covered with math problems that the boy hadn’t finished. And the caption read: *“No Ma’am, I am not an underachiever; you’re an over-expecter!”*

Again, sometimes we come before God’s Word with totally misguided expectations. Like the man who heard the evangelist say, “God’s word will change your life.” So, he decided that he would go home and read the Bible and do whatever it said. Well, he went home, opened his bible, closed his eyes and pointed down to the page and read: “And Judas went out and hung himself.” He said, “Oh no! I

can't do that." So, he tried it again, he opened the Bible, closed his eyes, pointed down at the page and read: "Go, ye and do likewise."

You know, friends, God's Word will shape your life. Paul told Timothy: "All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that God's people might be perfectly equipped for every work." And this is how we should approach God's Word.

There is a problem with unrealistic expectations.

Third, there is the problem of a difficult message! Jesus definitely didn't preach the message the people wanted to hear. They wanted to see miracles; they wanted a feel good message. But Jesus came preaching that the day of hope, justice, and freedom has come – not just for God's chosen people, but – for the Gentiles too. It's almost like Jesus was saying: "*Okay, you don't want to listen to my message; then, I'll preach it somewhere else.*" Now, that was a hard pill for them to swallow, because the Jews thought they had a corner on the market when it came to God. They were God's chosen people and the Gentiles were nothing more than fuel for the fires of hell.

But when Jesus looked at Israel, He saw fields ripe for the harvest, fields of Jews, and Samaritans, and Greeks, and Romans. And the bad thing is: He turned their favorite scriptures against them. He showed them how His mission to the Gentiles was exactly what God did in the Old Testament during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

One day, Brother Johnson got up and started preaching with great passion against the sins of the community. He preached about the evils of teenage pregnancy; He preached about the evils of smoking and drinking; He preached about the evils of the lottery and gambling. And every now and then, Sister Jenkins would sway back and forth and say: "Amen. Come on, preacher!" And then, started talking about dipping snuff and Sister Jenkins started squirming. She sat straight up in her seat and said: "*Now, preacher, you've stopped preaching and gone to meddling.*"

Brothers and sisters, sometimes God's Word gives us great comfort and support and encouragement and then, sometimes it hits us right between the eyes. Sometimes it's a message we've been longing to hear and sometimes it's a message we wish we didn't have to listen to. But it's always the word of God for the people of God.

There's the problem of a difficult message.

The people in Nazareth got so angry with Jesus that they wanted to kill Him because He was too familiar, because they had unrealistic expectations, and because His message wasn't the message they wanted to hear. I wonder how many times we miss out on what the Spirit is saying to the church because of the same reasons.

Oh friends, let us open our heart and minds to the word of God and let our prayer always be ... speak Lord, for your servants and listening.

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.