

4th Sunday After Epiphany

Grace, mercy and peace are yours because Jesus Christ was sent to us to release us from our prisons of sin by His Powerful Word.

NIV Luke 4:21 and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." 22 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. 23 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.'

Introduction: Francis Bacon, known as the founder of the scientific method wrote back in 1605: "For myself, I found that I was fitted for nothing so well as for the study of Truth; as having a mind nimble and versatile enough to catch the resemblances of things ... and at the same time steady enough to fix and distinguish their subtler differences; as being gifted by nature with desire to seek, patience to doubt, fondness to meditate, slowness to assert, readiness to consider, carefulness to dispose and set in order; and as being a man that neither affects what is new nor admires what is old, and that hates every kind of imposture."

In other words let me shorten it up for you, he said, "I'm a master of the art of being right." Now I know why I always liked Francis Bacon. I was wrong once, too, but I was mistaken. Making good decisions, being correct in our judgments is something we want for ourselves and to teach to our children. The world calls it critical thinking. And it is defined like this, Critical thinking is... "the art of thinking about your thinking while you are thinking in order to make your thinking better: more clear, more accurate, or more defensible. (Paul, Binker, Adamson, and Martin (1989))"

But what if our eyes deceive us? What if our nature is not gifted as Sir Francis Bacon asserted but instead is dead, blind and foolish? What if we have a disease – say a malignant self-love that overrides all our decisions, clouds our minds and taints our hearts every feeling? Can we make right judgments and excel at the art of being right with a sinful nature and a malignant self-love? We need a savior. We need a guide. We need to think more about the Word of Jesus: the truth, the reality.

Think more about the Word of Jesus!

His Word brings eternal blessings (v21-24)

His Word is the Word of God (v25-30)

Part 1) His Word brings eternal blessings (v21-24)

Jesus went home to Nazareth where he grew up in the home of Mary and Joseph and on a Sabbath day read from Isaiah 61. That chapter of Isaiah was the promise given to God's people that the messiah would come and preach good news to His people. The good news would be freedom, release, light and the year of the Lord's blessings! But Jesus didn't just read those words, he explained them in their fullest meaning, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing!" The promises that were foretold by Isaiah were happening right then and there. The people of Nazareth were hearing Jesus preaching good news, proclaiming freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners. The people were hearing the message that the coming Savior was to preach! The only logical conclusion in their thinking was that Jesus must be the one who Isaiah promised would come!

Every time Jesus preached the same thing happened. Sinners were released from their dark prisons of guilt, helplessness and hopelessness. Sinners heard the good news of forgiveness and that they were now living in God's favor! In fact even today whenever we or any Christian preaches Christ crucified for sinners, the captives are released, prisoners set free, the sad and lonely become the crowned sons and daughters of the King! Jesus' Words offer and bring to sinners eternal blessings! Joy, pride, peace, hope and on and on into eternity!

The crowds of Nazareth had to admit that they heard those beautiful "gracious words". But they also had another thought side-by-side those beautiful "gracious words". "Isn't this Joseph's son?" It was as if they were thinking in their minds between two opposite thoughts – Jesus' beautiful gracious words sound like they have some tremendous blessings to offer us, but on the other hand we grew up with him and saw Mary change

his diapers, we saw him lose at kickball, we heard his voice change as a teenager.” He’s no better than us. He is just a man like us. He can’t be the promised Savior.

Their eyes deceived them. By looking with their eyes and following their past experiences they saw only what they wanted to see. The same problem still remains today. People see and hear Jesus as a great teacher and example on how to live a moral, loving life. People see Christians, followers of this Jesus Christ, who talk about receiving powerful life changing blessings from him but don’t look or sound one bit different than the rest of the unbelieving world. They see Christians that are still poor, sick and even die. SO this Jesus Christ can’t be anything more than a man and at best a great teacher and example for us to follow.

Thank the Lord that through His Word he creates faith in our lives. Faith enables us to see Jesus for who he is in reality. But even for us baptized believing Christians, what we see, feel, and experience in this life attempts to undermine the Word of God and our faith. A child dies at a young age, a promotion goes to a co-worker with a reputation for having low morals, and a Christian family honestly paying off their debt seemingly never can catch up and give more of their budget to the Lord’s work. Let us think more about the Word of Jesus, for His Word is the only word that can help us make faith based decisions in this sinful world. NIV Romans 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Part 2) His Word is the Word of God

The people of Nazareth were critical of Jesus Words. They passed judgment on the truth of His Words. Without speaking it, Jesus could read their hearts and their minds. Jesus knew they wanted him to prove His Words were true to them. The Word of God was not enough for them. The people were thinking that Jesus should release himself first from this sinful world before he goes around promising to do it for everyone else, “Physician heal yourself.” Would you buy a miracle hair growth product from a bald salesman? Of course not! SO the people required Jesus to prove his Words with his actions by doing something right then and there for them, some sort of miracle. They criticized him. These two thoughts were at odds in their brains – Jesus’ Words sound great and promise eternal blessings. Jesus is the Carpenter’s son from our hometown of Nazareth, he’s no better than us. They criticized him.

Raising a critical eye to the Lord God almighty and questioning his Words and actions is not wise, because it is unbelief. But Jesus in his patience and compassion pointed out to them two past episodes when the nation of Israelites as a whole was critical of the Lord’s Word’s and actions: the time of Israel under the rule of Ahab and Jezebel when Elijah was the prophet of God and the Time of Israel during Elisha’s work as the prophet of God. In both instances the nation of Israel turned away from the Lord’s Words, so the result was that the Lord sent his powerful Word through his prophet to do miraculous great things for outsiders. The warning is clear from Jesus: Criticize the Lord’s Word and his actions and you run the risk of missing out on His powerful Word which brings eternal blessings and great miracles, like healing leprosy, filling the pantry with food and even raising the dead. Criticize the Lord and you will miss out!

Could we be guilty of criticizing the Lord? Do we question his Words and actions when we look at life issues? Are we really to blame ourselves for the lack of God’s power at work in our life? You and I hate to be wrong. And we do strange things in our own heads to make ourselves feel in the right. It is this strange malignant self-love that we all have that changes and manipulates the truth to our liking. We are prideful and selfish and arrogant. We change the truth to make ourselves feel better.

It is seen in Aesop’s fable of the fox and the grapes. A fox one day saw a huge cluster of grapes high on a vine. They looked mouthwatering great. He thought and thought how to reach them but it was hopeless. He couldn’t ever hope to reach them. So...he thought to himself the grapes are probably sour. And went on his way happy he didn’t eat the sour grapes. The truth that we must come to grips with is that God’s Word is correct. We are sinners, deserving nothing and ruining everything. God is faithful to his promises. He is not a man that he should lie or a son of man that changes his mind. His Word is dependable.

Today who will we be? Will we choose to be delusional and live a lie that we are good people and God rewards good people? Or will we repent of our sins, listen to God’s Word, arrange our life based on God’s Word and honor the Lord by thinking about God’s Word first in foremost in all our decision making?

Ironically God did do a miracle for the people of Nazareth that day even after they were critical of him. When the people of Nazareth decided to turn on the Lord and kill him instead of repenting of their sins and admitting their unbelief, Jesus Christ showed them his true identity and walks unharmed and untouched through the crowd that wanted to tear him to pieces. He seemed to be a simple man from a simple town of Nazareth, but in reality he was and is still today God Almighty.

So Pastor you are saying that if we think more about Jesus' Words and repent of our sins Jesus will do great miracles for us? Yes and No. First your thinking is, well, not Jesus thinking. Jesus' Words clearly tell us that he will provide everything we need for body life into eternity. We have no needs that Jesus cannot or will not meet. The difference will be seen through the eyes of faith, not with your worldly desires and selfish eyes. Through the eyes of faith and the Words of Jesus we will see more and more the great miracles the Lord does in this world everyday, spiritually and physically.

From the simple waters of baptism, we see through the eyes of faith a baby receiving a crown of eternal life as a son and daughter of the King. From the simple rain showers, we see our Heavenly Father causing grain to grow for unbelievers and believers alike because of His great love for people. What tremendous blessings there are in thinking on Jesus Words more and more every day! Don't miss out for another single day!