

*Grace and peace are yours through Jesus. Amen.*

When expectation does not match reality, it can be hard to handle. The family road trip that you thought would bring you together, made you really happy to be apart. The new pastor whom you hoped would be a stud, turned out to be a dud. Or the Bible reading plan that you expected to strengthen your faith, killed it instead.

It's sad but true. Every year Christians try reading the Bible cover to cover. And every year many of them flood social media with comments about how reading the Bible turned them into unbelievers.

They heard that the Bible is the best book ever written, and they expected great things. But then they started reading it, and found all sorts of stuff that they didn't like – ideas that didn't make sense, concepts that seemed out of date and rules for living that they didn't want to follow. Turns out that the Word of God is offensive.

And it is. But when it comes to the Bible, it's not just an idea here or a rule there that people find offensive. No, the Bible is offensive to its very core. In fact, its most offensive idea is the one at its center: the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:18).

And this offensiveness is not a new phenomenon, it is as old as the Bible itself. I mean, just look at what happened to Jesus today. Being offended by Jesus' Word is not the exception, it's the rule. Maybe not what you expect, but definitely **more than you expect**.

**He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom (4:16).** The people in Nazareth expected great things. Jesus had been a public figure for year now and his fame was spreading (Luke 4:14-15). He was back in his hometown; in the synagogue, the place of worship, on the Sabbath, the day of worship.

**He stood up to read, <sup>17</sup> and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <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 (4:16-20).**

Seven hundred years earlier, God used the Prophet Isaiah to make this promise about the coming Savior. Generations of Israelites heard this prophecy and prayed for the Messiah to come and fulfill it. Everyone in that synagogue expected to hear a passage like that on the Sabbath.

What they did not expect was for Jesus to begin his sermon by saying: **"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21).** They expected an exposition of God's Word, what they got was its fulfillment.

How did they take it? **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 (4:22).** The mood went from amazement to skepticism. Sure, they were impressed by Jesus' words. But those words forced them to admit some very difficult things.

First, if Jesus were telling the truth, then *they* were the people that Isaiah was talking about. They were the poor beggars, who offered God nothing. They were the prisoners of sin and death, who could not escape. They were the blind, who were lost in darkness.

Second, if Jesus were telling the truth, then *he* was the only one who could fix their problem. And because they knew Jesus so well, because they watched him grow up, they were skeptical.

Now just pause for a moment, and think about this. Jesus is the central character of the Bible. And he preached a sermon about the central message of the Bible. And when the Bible's main character preached about the Bible's main message, people were offended.

And these were not a bunch of godless heathens who didn't know any better. These were God's own people, sitting in church. But when expectation does not match reality, it can be hard to handle.

Jesus saw where this was going. **"Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum'" (4:23).**

You would expect Jesus to get a warm welcome in his hometown, but they did not believe him. They wanted him to prove his identity by working miracles like he had done elsewhere. The message of Jesus is offensive even among those who are most familiar with him.

Like you. Here you are, in God's house, the place of worship, on Sunday, the day of worship, hearing the same words of Jesus – words that force you to admit some very difficult things. Like the Nazarenes you know Jesus well.

And it is easy to admit that you're here for motivation or guidance from Jesus. But to confess that your condition is hopeless (Ephesians 2:12), and that he is the only one who can save you (Acts 4:12), that's a little bit tougher.

When Jesus calls your favorite sin, *sin* – that hurts. Think of the conversations you've ended or the people you've ignored because you were hearing what you did not want to hear about the way you were living.

And what about Jesus? If he really did come to be the only solution to our biggest problem, then you would expect him to be a little bit more impressive, to make a little bit more of a difference in your life, to speak a little less offensively.

Your sinful flesh does not want a Jesus who tells you God's truth; you want a Jesus who goes along with what you already think. And what was true that day in Nazareth is still true today: the message of Jesus is offensive even among those who are most familiar with him.

So how is Jesus going to fix this? The idea at the heart and core of Scripture, the message that Jesus came to proclaim, inevitably offends the people who hear it. Well, it doesn't need fixing. Being offended by Jesus' Word is not the exception, it's the rule. Maybe not what you expect, but definitely **more than you expect**.

Look at this. You'd think Jesus would change tactics to win the crowd over, but he doubles down. **"Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in his hometown" (4:24)**. It's always been that way. The same thing happened nine hundred years earlier to the prophets Elijah and Elisha: God's people rejected them, and foreigners welcomed them **(4:25-27)**.

And then the Nazarenes proved his point. **All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 29 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 off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way (4:28-30)**.

They tried to kill him! And you focus on the delicious irony that the people who wanted a miracle finally got one, because somehow Jesus just walked through the mob. But do not miss what he did next: **he went on his way (4:30)**.

After what happened, you would expect Jesus to say, "Forget this. I'm out." But instead, he went on his way. Back to work. Back to the mission for which he was anointed. Did you catch it? Three times in that passage from Isaiah, it says that Messiah was anointed to proclaim.

The Nazarenes expected miracles, but miracles are temporary. Sure, Jesus healed the blind, the deaf and the crippled, but they all died. Those miracles lasted a short time. But Jesus' Word is **more than you expect**, it is forever. Freedom, sight, release and favor – won by the Savior and given to you.

Because Jesus did not die at the bottom of some random, no name hill in Nazareth. He died on a hill named Golgotha (John 19:17), on a cross, *the cross*, with the sins of the world on his shoulders. Then he rose, the Master and Conquer of death, to fill your poor hands with every good thing, to free you from death by giving you eternal life. Jesus gives **more than you expect** by bringing what he proclaimed.

"Yeah, but pastor, if proclamation is what he's all about, shouldn't he tone it down a bit? If he were less offensive, wouldn't more people want to hear him?" Maybe. But if everything that you hear from Jesus is exactly the same as what you hear from yourself and from the world, why bother listening to Jesus? If a doctor never told people that they were sick and never offered any treatment, would anyone come to him?

So if you are under the false illusion that you are spiritually healthy, you need Jesus to tell it like it is. That you are a poor, blind prisoner of sin and death. That he alone holds the keys to that prison, and he alone sets you free (Revelation 1:18).

And does that offend? Yes, the same way a cancer diagnosis does. Does that hurt? Yes, the same way lifesaving treatment does, treatment that comes with painful side effects. But the very thing that causes it to hurt, is what gives it the power to heal.

The offensiveness of Jesus' message is not the exception, it's the rule, it's what gives it its effectiveness. And you need to continue to hear from Jesus, not unless or until or if he offends you. But you need to hear from Jesus so that he offends you.

Is that what you expect? Maybe not. But in Jesus you have **more than you expect** and all that you need. Amen.