

**JESUS LIKE ELIJAH AND ELISHA WAS NOT SENT ONLY FOR THE JEWS – Biblical commentary by
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Luke 4,21-30

And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth. And they said, “Is not this Joseph's son?” And he said to them, “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.” And he said, “Truly, I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his hometown. 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. 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.” When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away

This Sunday's reading presents us with Jesus' first failed preaching in Nazareth. The evangelist - as we have seen last Sunday - presents Jesus at Nazareth, he stands up and reads the famous passage, well known, expected, that of the prophet Isaiah, chapter 61 that indicates the coming of the Messiah. But, arriving at the point where it says “...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” Jesus stops reading and does not continue with the much-expected next verse: “...the day of vengeance of our God;”

This is what the people were expecting, dominated by the Romans. So let us see the continuation of this verse, Luke's gospel chapter 4, 21-30. “And he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled.. “ The evangelist continues saying, “.. in your hearing.” Jesus is referring to a quote from the prophet Ezekiel that says that the people have ears but do not hear, because they are a rebellious race, prepare for that which follows.

And all ... that is all in the synagogue ... And here we have to translate correctly... spoke well of him, namely "witnessed" upon him. The verb "to witness" in Greek language is martireo, the word from which "martyr" derives, a term we all know. It is a positive witness or negative depending upon the relevant framework. In this passage it is clearly a witness against him, so it is better to translate as "all those present were against him".

"And all spoke well of him, and wondered... " at what? "... at the gracious words.. ", because Jesus had not spoken of the vengeance against the Roman rulers, but only of grace.

"..which proceeded out of his mouth; and they said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" They are not doubting the fatherhood of Joseph, because, as the evangelist had written, "...being the son (as was supposed) of Joseph,(Luke 3,23). But "son", in the culture of that time, did not only indicate one born of the father, but one who was similar in behaviour, So, evidently Jesus was not similar to his father in behaviour. It is probable that Joseph participated in these violent nationalistic ideals. In the Jewish text of the time, the name "Joseph" actually meant "the panther" therefore it gives the idea of something aggressive.

So, Jesus was not like his father. Jesus, rather than calming the souls, makes things worse. *"And he said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Physician, heal yourself;.. " It will be the same as was said on the cross, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" (Luke 23, 37)*

"..what we have heard you did...." Here Jesus, rather than calming them, agitates them by talking of the rival city of Nazareth , "...at Caper'na-um, do here also in your own country.'" Using the phrase "in your own country" the evangelist wants to make understood that which will happen at Nazareth will then represent everything that will happen on earth.

"And he said, "Truly,..." Therefore a solemn statement... "...I say to you, no prophet is acceptable in his own country." Why? Who is the prophet? It is a person that is in harmony with God that does not repeat the things of the past, but creates new ones. So here, there will be always a victim of the aversion and opposition of the priestly class in power. Then Jesus does what he should not do. In the history of Israel, there were two episodes that were better forgotten. They were episodes in which, in front of an emergency, God had helped not the Jews, that had the right and the privilege, but he went to help no less than those despised, the Gentiles.

They were two episodes that were best forgotten. However, Jesus remembers them. *"But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Eli'jah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when there came a great famine over all the land; and Eli'jah was sent to none of them but only to Zar'ephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow."* Therefore the land of the Gentiles. Jesus is indicating that God's love is universal, that it doesn't only mean "expansion", everywhere, but the quality, for all.

God's love is not aimed at the merits of the person, but their needs.

And then Jesus adds more wood to the fire. *“And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Eli’sha; and none of them was cleansed, but only Na’aman the Syrian.”* Another Gentile, if not even an enemy of Israel. It is too much. In fact, *“When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath.”* “All” were the same that the evangelist had said, *“..all spoke well of him”*, were not against him.

“ And they rose up and put him out of the city, ..” The evangelist is anticipating what will be his end when he will be outside the holy city of Jerusalem.

“..and led him to the brow of the hill..” This refers to Mount Sion on which Jerusalem was built, therefore the evangelist in this episode anticipates for us what will be the end of Jesus, the total rejection of his people

“..on which their city was built, that they might throw him down headlong.” The first time Jesus preaches in a Synagogue the result is that they want to kill him. For Jesus, never runs the risk of danger with the sinners, with the mob or with the dregs of society, the places and the people most dangerous will be those religious. They will be the ones that try to kill and eliminate him.

“But passing through the midst of them.....” Why does the evangelist writes this that seems a bit strange. All those present in the synagogue try to capture Jesus and kill him and he walks through the midst of them? The evangelist is anticipating the fact of the resurrection; death does not take hold of Jesus, he continues to go his way.

The passage concludes with *“..he went away.”* Where to? To Jerusalem. So, Jesus by this first rejection in his homeland understood that he had only met with opposition and danger of death. But Jesus does not give up. He must be testimony of God’s forgiveness, of the love of the Father, even at the expense of his own life.