

DCF:

He had met the love of his life. They had dated for 5 years, starting in college. Now, they were both in their first year of working at different companies. Things were going great. Their personalities were compatible and they enjoyed a lot of the same hobbies. They had talked about their personal values and their dreams for the future. Both families loved them dearly. They had even looked at wedding rings and discussed the venue that they preferred.

At sunset, by the lake where they had their first date, he asked her to marry him. And she said no. Stunned, the only words that came out of his mouth were "Well, I didn't expect that."

That's the first reaction I had when I read the words of today's text. Jesus had just gotten done revealing Himself as the Messiah to the Jewish congregation in Nazareth. They spoke positively about His speaking, and then Jesus says some rather harsh words. **"I DIDN'T EXPECT THAT."** Come with me today and learn why Jesus said what He said. The fact is, His message and invitation to believe that He is the Messiah was derailed by human perceptions and human opposition.

Part One: Derailed by human perceptions

What would we give to be in the sandals of the Nazarites? There, right in front of them, in their church, was the Messiah. Here was the person they had been waiting for for thousands of years! Here was the person whom Abraham had waited for. David had wanted to see Him. Isaiah and Daniel and Micah had prophesied about Him. All of the Old Testament believers had longed to see Him, and here He was! What a marvelous opportunity, and what we wouldn't give to be in their place.

Right? Well, they didn't see it that way. They didn't believe that Jesus was the Son of God. They didn't believe that God was right in front of them. All these people could see was a young man who had grown up in their town, working and worshiping right along side of themselves. They were hampered by their familiarity with Jesus. How could this young man, who had played with their children, who had worked in the carpenter shop with Joseph, who had skipped and laughed and joked with other children, be the Messiah? They thought the Messiah would be a heroic figure, someone who would command armies, slay their enemies and set them free from the Romans. What they saw in Jesus, and what they believed the Messiah would be, put roadblocks in their hearts. Their human perceptions got in the way of the message that Jesus was bringing to them.

Jesus understood this, and tried to eliminate these roadblocks. It is quite evident from the text, and from other portions of the other Gospels, that Jesus went on to explain the words that Isaiah had written so many years ago. I'm sure He explained that He was the Messiah. I'm sure He told them He had come to save them from their sins. I'm sure He emphasized the fact that He had come to free them from the grip of the devil. At first, His words made a dramatic impact. As verse 22 begins ***"All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."*** But those words weren't enough to break through their human perceptions. ***"Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.*** They couldn't believe that this man, born from lowly stock, could be the Messiah. And, as we see from the following verses, they rejected Him as their personal Savior in a most dramatic way.

Was this unusual, this rejection of Jesus? No, not really. Jesus goes on to remind us that human perceptions are still alive and well in this world. And far too often, those human perceptions get in the way of the message of the Gospel. ***"I tell you the truth," he continued, 'no prophet is accepted in his home town.'"*** (v. 24) There's a reason why pastors usually don't serve the congregation they grew up in. People have a hard time overcoming the perceptions they have of a certain individual. They look at a pastor, and remember the time that young man told a joke in Sunday School and had his classmates shaking in laughter while the teacher tried to teach. They remember that he got a ticket for speeding when he was young. They remember the time he toilet papered the neighbor's house. They remember his awkwardness and stumbling recitation at the examination service. And now they have to put that all aside and regard him as a messenger of Christ? It's just too hard a job for most people to do.

It's just as hard for a new Christian to spread the Word of Christ to his or her old friends. It has happened time and time again. Human perceptions get in the way of the Word. There was a young lady who grew up in a non-Christian home. All through high school she didn't believe, but the time came when the Holy Spirit, through the effort of a close friend, brought her to faith. Oh, she was excited to share her new-found hope of eternal life! But, her friends remembered her non-Christian ways, her non-Christian life. The message that this young lady spoke couldn't cut through the perceptions they had of her previous life. And, they rejected her message and her hope for them.

That's the way it is in this world. Our previous perceptions filter the messages that come our way. So, what do we do? What do we do when we have the greatest message of all, and people reject the

news that we want them to have? Well, we do what Christ did. We focus on the message. We point to the truth. We tell what Jesus has done in our lives. The power for eternal life comes from God. Let Him do the work. He just wants us to be messengers. Focus on His words, His power and His actions, not yours.

And yet, despite our best intentions, it doesn't always work. Jesus didn't convert everyone He talked to, and we won't, either. Why? Because people still oppose the message of Christ.

Part Two: Derailed by human opposition

There always has been, and always will be, opposition to Christ's message. I don't know if we will meet the kind of opposition that Jesus met when He spoke to the Nazarenes. He used the examples of Elisha and Elijah to drive home the point that they were rejecting God's anointed Messiah. And because of this, God would reject them. They became absolutely furious with Jesus and His words, so furious that they tried to kill Him. We can almost image what they were thinking when they got this message. Who did Jesus think He was? Did He think He was better than them? The Messiah? You've got to be kidding! Let's take him down a peg and show Him He's no better than us. How dare He think to tell us that we're rejecting the Word of God!

When you take a good look at this opposition, you will notice that it's not really logical. Why try to kill the one who has come to save you? And freely, at that? All of us need help with our sins. We all know, deep down inside, that we have to be better than we are to get to heaven. God's Law shows us that we have to be absolutely perfect, and we certainly are not. God shows us in His Word that we deserve to suffer in hell for all the things that we do wrong, and we know it is true! We can't earn eternal life. We need help to get to paradise.

Christ offers to all of us a free and complete payment for our sins. He holds out to us a complete pardon for all our sins. He says "It's free. It's yours." Why would we reject a free gift? Do we think there are strings attached? There are no strings to God's gift. Christ suffered and died to pay for all our sins, and it is freely given to all who believe. So simple. So clear. Such a loving gift!

And yet, people still reject this wonderful gift! Oh, what an example those Nazarenes show us, an example that we shudder at. It still resonates with us today, for there are literally millions of people who have reacted in the very same way. Literally millions have let their stubborn illogical sinful nature damn them. "I'm not going to believe, because I don't want to believe. I don't want to hear it!" Perhaps people are guided by a faulty philosophy that believes there's no such thing as a free lunch.

Ever run into that illogical thinking? I'm sure most of you have, especially if you have tried to reach out to a friend with the news of eternal life. Oh, it may have not been as violent as the reaction that Jesus experienced. But most of us have experienced rejection. Remember that time you invited your neighbor to church, and he politely begged off? Or, that time you tried to talk to him about sin and heaven, and he gently turned away, or changed the conversation? They have rejected your attempt to share the news of heaven, and you knew it.

Take comfort in the fact that they are not rejecting you, but the message that you came to share. Just because someone rejects the truth doesn't mean that the truth isn't true. It simply means they don't want to hear it at that time. Chances are, you've struck a spiritual sore spot. There's guilt, fear, pride, sorrow that they don't want to deal with at this time. Or, you've run into someone who just doesn't want to hear the news of Jesus.

And yet, the Word works! You may not see it, but it does! The Word of God is powerful and active, able to create faith and bring people to heaven. It accomplishes what the Lord wants it to accomplish.

So, keep on spreading the Word. If someone rejects the message that you have, then move on to someone else. That's exactly what Christ did, and that's what He still does today. The history of Christianity shows us that the Lord will bring His message to others if it is rejected. It doesn't mean there won't be return visits, but it means we go where the Lord opens doors. Pray for wisdom as we spread the Word. And always remember that we are doing His will, despite opposition to the message that we bring.

Everyone we share the Gospel with will not always believe. Things may be going quite well in your witnessing to others, but then suddenly without explanation, they stop listening to you or even cut you out of their life. Stunned, you may exclaim "**I DIDN'T EXPECT THAT**". Don't worry. It's not you. Today Jesus reminds us that there will always be human opposition and persecution. There will always be those that reject the news that Jesus is the Messiah.

But keep on talking. There will be some that believe because of the Word you bring to them.
AMEN