

Pride and Prejudice
February 7, 2016

The annual **Consumer Electronics Show** was held last month in Las Vegas. Each year at this show, companies from all over the world introduce new electronic products and prototypes. This year, one company had a plastic TV screen that was as thin as a piece of paper. They billed it as a **fully flexible OLED screen**. You can roll it up just like a piece of paper. It was the high point of the show this year. Everyone was talking about it.

I imagine such was the atmosphere in the nation of Israel when Jesus began His ministry. Everyone was talking about Jesus. "Have you heard the news? There is a miracle worker roaming the hills of Galilee. He can heal people of any disease and cast out demons. He is announcing the arrival of the kingdom of God."

The news about Jesus traveled to every town and village. The news also reached His home town of Nazareth. I'm sure the folks there were wondering if Jesus would make an appearance back home. And indeed, He did. We pick up the story in Luke's biography of Jesus, in chapter 4.

Luke 4:16-22 (NIV) He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

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, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

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.

The gracious words were the announcement that what God had promised long ago was now, today, coming true. That was good news. But even as they heard that news with gladness, they wondered where Jesus got the authority to claim such things. The hometown folk did not believe He had any such authority.

The people of Nazareth believed they knew all about Jesus. That question they asked, "Isn't this Joseph's son?" is a rhetorical question. They were not expecting an answer. We would say it this way, "We know you. You are Joseph's boy. You're just a carpenter. You're just one of us. Quit claiming to be someone you are not."

Jesus had lived most of his life in their village. They knew who he was. They knew his family. They knew his relatives.

They knew He was intelligent, easy-going, forgiving, a peace-maker, honest, a hard worker, supporting His widowed mother. But there had never been any sign of Him being a prophet. There were no child-hood miracles, no special powers, no prophecies. There was no evidence that He was anybody special.

No, the hometown crowd could not accept Jesus as being anything more than what they always believed Him to be, the carpenter's son. This is what they believe, despite hearing of the miracles he has done elsewhere and seeing healings he has done in Nazareth since his return. Mark's biography tells us Jesus healed a few people here. But that, evidently, meant nothing to them.

They believed they knew all about Jesus. **Yet their knowledge was incomplete.** There was much about Jesus they did not know. They did not know he was the Son of God. They did not know He was fully God and fully man. They did not know He was the Messiah. They did not know that He would die to save them from their sins.

Some of you have known Jesus for decades, and yet there is a lot about Jesus you don't yet know. The hometown folk too, were missing lots of information about Jesus.

Outside of Nazareth, many people were guessing as to who He might be. Some people wondered if he were a prophet, or one of the two expected prophets, or even if he might be the Messiah. But no one really knew for sure.

Today there are still various views about Jesus. Some people believe that Jesus never existed at all, that He is a myth. Others believe that a man named Jesus did live about 2000 years ago. But they only believe that he was a man. He may have been an exceptionally good man, maybe a gifted philosopher or moral teacher, but just a man. Others believe He was a genuine prophet from God, maybe a special prophet, but just a prophet. Then there are those who believe Him to be the long-expected Messiah that God had promised would come and fulfill the promises of God to Israel.

So there are lots of opinions about who Jesus is. What about your friends, who do they believe Jesus to be?

But the folk in Nazareth are not wondering or debating the identity of Jesus. They are convinced that what they have always believed about Him is all He is. They had zero openness to Him being suddenly called by God to be a prophet. They want more proof than healing a few sick people.

Jesus knows that nothing He does here will convince them. And he points that out to them.

Luke 4:23-24 (NIV) 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.'"

"I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown.

The phrase "Physician heal yourself" means that if a doctor claimed to be able to heal people, he ought to be able to heal himself too. Jesus isn't sick, but the figure of speech still fits the situation. If Jesus really has any authority from God to do miracles, He should be able to do them in His hometown as well as anywhere else.

But Jesus knows they will not accept Him as having authority from God, no matter what He does. And He says as much.

So, we have a bit of an awkward situation. They want a miracle and Jesus is resisting them. Jesus could have just walked away, but the Nazareth folks wouldn't be any closer to real faith than before. And, they would all be saying, "We thought so. You aren't anybody special. You were just telling lies. You may have fooled everybody in Capernaum, but You can't fool us." That's what they would have said as Jesus left town.

But instead, Jesus says something to purposefully antagonize them. If you read carefully the Jesus biographies in the Bible you see Jesus doing this regularly. He says something to purposefully antagonize the crowd. He reminds the hometown folk of two events in Israel's past. It is this that sets them against Him.

Luke 4:25-27 (NIV) I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian."

The first story points out that in a time of drought and famine, when many Jews were starving, God graciously and miraculously gave food to a non-Jewish widow, a hated Canaanite. And during a time when there were many Jews suffering with leprosy, God chose to graciously and miraculously heal only a general in the enemy army.

The hometown folk are greatly prejudiced against all non-Jews. They would just as soon see all non-Jews destroyed by God. They don't want to hear anything different.

Some of you know the story of Jonah and the whale. When God first gives Jonah his assignment to go to Nineveh, he instead runs away. But Jonah did not run away because he was afraid of the Ninevites. **Jonah ran away because he did not want God to give them a chance to repent.** They did repent, and God did not destroy them then. And Jonah was angry over God's mercy to Nineveh. Jonah did not want God to be gracious to anyone but the Jews. Neither did the people of Jesus' hometown.

But there is another aspect to Jesus telling them this bit of history. Jesus is implying that none of the Jews of old were worthy of God's blessings and that the current hometown folk are just like them. They are not worthy of Jesus giving them what they want.

They did not expect to hear they were not worthy of God's blessings. If Jesus were a messenger of God, then they, as his hometown folk, deserved whatever Jesus could do for them. But Jesus refused. He implies that they are not worthy of it. And this angers them.

Luke 4:28-30 (NIV) All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. 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 down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Their pride and prejudice enraged them and they sought to kill him, one of their own. But he gave them a miracle after all, and slipped away from their grasp.

Their own pride and prejudice kept them from receiving Jesus as someone different from whom they believed Him to be. They would not believe Jesus to be even a prophet.

How long did you resist Jesus because of your pride or prejudice? How long were you comfortable in what you chose to believe about Jesus? And what about your friend? What is keeping your friend from faith in Jesus? Could pride be an issue of resistance?

Jesus was not content to leave them in their pride and prejudice. He needed to do something to move them.

There are several common elements between the two stories Jesus told. One is pride. **Both the Canaanite widow and the Syrian general had reasons to be proud over the Israelites.** The woman lived in Sidon, an area that the Jews were supposed to conquer when they invaded the land. But they had not been able to subdue the cities of Sidon or Tyre. So those Canaanites cities had reason to be proud over the Israelites.

The Naaman the general of Syria's army had reason to be proud over Israel too. The Syrian army had been harassing Israel towns and villages for years, carrying off people as slaves to Syria. It was one of those slaves who told Naaman about the prophet Elisha who could heal him of leprosy.

The second thing the two had in common is that they **both had to humble themselves to an Israelite and take an action in order to receive the promised blessing.** One had to give him part of the last food she had. The other had to go dip himself in a Jewish river, instead of a Syrian river.

These acts required them to humble themselves in order to receive the promised blessing. And both of them did humble themselves and did what was asked of them. Both humbled themselves before the prophet from Israel's god. Both received the promised blessing. Both had reason to worship the God of Israel.

Today, Jesus is holding out a blessing to you. Jesus is holding out the promise of forgiveness of all of your sins, if you will only humble yourself, receive Jesus as your Savior, and turn your life over to Him as your Lord.

It doesn't take a lot of faith. But too much pride can keep you from the blessings. Don't you WANT to be forgiven of all of your sins? Don't you want to escape the consequences those sins will bring you? Today, put your faith in Jesus.

Christian, you once humbled yourself before Jesus. Do so again today. It is the path to all of the blessings available in Him.