

### Having Struggles?

This is a talk for people who may be struggling, perhaps within your family, your church, your place of work, your home town. Jesus understands, he's been there, had hard struggles, had a tough time when on the earth. For this we'll use mainly Luke 4.14-28 and Matthew 4.12-17. These 2 sections of the Bible are in chronological order.

### Jesus Begins to Preach – Matthew 14.12-17

When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he returned to Galilee. Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali – to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

“Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,  
the way to the sea, along the Jordan,  
Galilee of the Gentiles –  
the people living in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
on those living in the land of the shadow of death  
a light has dawned.”

From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.”

### Jesus Rejected at Nazareth – Luke 4.14-28

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. 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 favour.”

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. 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. 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."

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.

## The History

Jesus returned from the temptation from the devil in the power of the Spirit. Jesus already knew that John the Baptist had been imprisoned. These were the prompts that encouraged Jesus into his ministry of preaching the Kingdom of God. He knew it was time.

## Honeymoon Period

Jesus moved back to Galilee. If you find a map of the Bible you'll see that Nazareth is in the region of Galilee – [click here for a good map](#). When Jesus preached in the region of Galilee we see that initially he was greeted with great respect, awe and people praised him, both in the region and then in his home town.

Interestingly we see the same picture of the early apostles at the end of Acts 2. However, for both Jesus and the disciples, things would soon change from the early days of encouragement.

When you move into a new situation, do a new ministry, set up a new church – there can be encouragement early days with the buzz, excitement and fresh move of God causing goodwill and good things. But so often, this so-called 'honeymoon' period can end as people begin to see frailties and weakness in you, as people decide they would do things differently – and as your desire to initiate change runs into opposition from people too comfortable in their comfort zone. Sound familiar?

Jesus faced this before you, so he knows how you feel and he gives us the example in how to deal with it.

What we'll go on to see is that the criticism and struggle that Jesus faced are very contemporary.

## Back Home

Jesus moved back to his home town of Nazareth and started to read from the scroll. People had heard about him (maybe they have about you) and were expecting much. So what did Jesus do? Well, he carried on with his custom, which was to go on into the Synagogue. No arrogance, no big headed-ness, just simply getting on with his life and purpose. You?

Then Jesus read from the scroll, quoting from what we now call Isaiah 61. Then, in a quietly dramatic way, he sat down and read from the Bible. People were amazed at the words of grace that came from Jesus. Words of grace. See, Jesus had nothing to prove, no-one to impress, no issues. He knew his purpose, was committed to it and from his mouth came only words that build up, words of truth. What about you?

Initially, Jesus had no problems. People in the synagogue were up for hearing from the Bible. It's the same in our lives, our mission fields, our churches. People want to hear the Bible, local newspapers have 'Bible verses of the day' and folks have got a copy of the Bible on the shelf. To a point, people are prepared to hear and receive.

We'll pick back up on this in a bit..

## Who Are Ya?

At footie matches we're used to the jeers of the fans singing, 'who are ya, who are ya?' at other fans and other players to mock them and knock them down.

Jesus faced something similar. Maybe you do too. When Jesus was in the synagogue and had finished reading from Isaiah 61, the people were amazed and looked at each other saying, 'hang on, this is Jesus, the son of Joseph, the carpenter. Joseph's not a bright or very religious button, how come Jesus is coming out with all this?'

If you're the son or daughter of a preacher or pastor, you'll be aware of how people get to know you via your parent. I had it and my old man wasn't even a pastor – just a church leader. People would say, 'oh that's Steve, son of Denis..' It used to drive me nuts as I wanted to be me! Now people don't say it, because they know me as me. So be encouraged if you get this kind of thing – it won't last and it will become less of an issue! You don't have to rebel – just be yourself and get respect for who God has made you.

Other times we can gain disrespect for who our parents are, where we live, our estate, housing block, family history. But no worries because Jesus wasn't phased in any way by what people said. God made you as you are. You're a work in progress but you are you and if you come from a hard background, that is no barrier. You are a new creation – 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!' So you're a new being. You're not subject to curses over your family if you've accepted Christ. Interestingly in Deuteronomy 28.15 we see that God said that only those people who disobeyed God's commands would be subject to his curses.

If you are a child of God, seeking his face, committed to obeying his will then you have entered into the blessing of Abraham and out of the curse. How do we know this? Because the Bible tells us in Galatians 3:14 which says, 'He (Jesus) redeemed us (redeemed means made us right before God, if we accept Jesus) in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.'

## Back To The Plot

In a world of criticism, discouragement, lack of hope, bitterness, resentment – it would be a hope that this wouldn't even enter into our churches and ministries. And yet it does. Through jealousy, lack of understanding, frustration, a desire for things to improve,

annoyance at people's behaviour and so on, the life of being a minister of the Gospel can be a hard one. Paul the Apostle also found life very tough with shipwrecks, beatings, stoning, imprisonment and more. But Jesus is our role model as ever.

What did Jesus say that so upset the people in the synagogue? Simply that a prophet is without honour in his home town? It was more than this..

1. When Jesus spoke and said that the prophecy made in Isaiah was fulfilled in their presence, he said 3 things. Firstly it said that the prophecy was fulfilled in the present. Second it meant that Jesus was claiming the personal fulfillment of Isaiah's words, by saying that the prophecy was fulfilled by him. Thirdly it meant that the day of God's salvation had arrived, through Jesus and Jesus alone.

2. Jesus was treated as Joseph's son, not as himself, a prophet. In his home town, the people didn't believe he was a prophet and wanted a sign, some evidence, before they would believe. Jesus, rightly, saw this as a lack of faith and unbelief. So he would not give people the 'evidence' they wanted – instead he pointed to the fact that the prophets of old were also disrespected in their home town..

For this, Jesus used the example of Elijah and Elisha. Jesus pointed out that there were many widows in Israel at the time of Elijah and yet Elijah was sent by God to stay with a widow from a town in Sidon. Then Jesus spoke to say there were many people with skin diseases in Israel at the time of Elisha and yet none were healed, only Naaman was healed, and he was from Syria.

3. Feelings of amazement at what Jesus had said quickly turned to hostility. How dare this son of Joseph, this carpenter's boy, come in to the synagogue and declare that he was fulfilling the words of an old prophet. How dare this man personalize the Word of God and claim that the truth of God was to be found in him. How dare this man criticise their town.

4. Faith – as we've seen, one of the main accusations Jesus made was that the people in Nazareth lacked faith. This was backed up by evidence from the life of Elijah.

So the people quickly turned. But in a miracle on par with any (and certainly similar to Peter's release from prison and the modern day story of Brother Yun in 'The Heavenly Man'), Jesus simply walked through the crowd. Exactly how Jesus did this, we don't know!

## Your Life

We said that this story had a contemporary ring to it. How? Well, the world is full of 'truths' now. We are surrounded by many 'gods' today – TV, computers, fashion, looking good, sex, Buddhism, Islam, technology, power, money. But Jesus came to the earth and personalized God's Word to him. We know that Jesus is THE truth, THE way. We know from Acts 7.28 that, '..in him (Jesus) we live, and move, and have our being.'

But the world doesn't want to hear. People will say, 'you've got your truth, I've got mine, don't force your truth on my truth.' Even a supposedly 'Christian' ex-President in the USA called George Bush famously (and wrongly!) said that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The only truth today is that there is no truth, except the truth that there is no truth! Yet another one of the world's many contradictions.

So it is hard to preach Jesus. People want evidence today too. 'Show me the evidence that Jesus is real and is God' and 'I'll believe you' is the comment. I use my testimony about how God has changed me to witness to people. What strategy are you going to use in this changing world? I tell you one thing, more than ever, we need to stand on truth and proclaim the Gospel, that Jesus is the way, the only way.

## Your Struggles

Let's take this back to the struggles you may be having.

**First up**, Jesus has been there and understands. Right from the off in his ministry, Jesus had his home town trying to kill him by throwing him off a cliff. So let's go in prepared. We also see evidence that it is religious folks (today we would say the church) that can be the most resentful, along with society at large, when you may be trying to point people to truth or if you are a visionary or prophet. But let's not suffer unnecessarily! Let's not make a rod for our own back by being critical ourselves or by being super spiritual. I've heard people claim that they are being 'attacked' because of their Christian faith – when in actual fact they are being attacked because of the way they are behaving, not because of their faith. Let's not be unnecessary Christian 'martyrs' without good cause, it dishonours God.

**Secondly..** Can some of your struggles be attributed to the words that have come from your mouth.

Proverbs 21:23 says, 'He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.' The Bible has a lot to say about the tongue, about the damage it can cause. See James 3.

You see if we answer people in a Godly way, we have no worries about our words coming back to haunt us. If we build people up, and correctly rebuke them in love where necessary, avoiding gossip, we save ourselves from problems. Where we criticise and judge, we can have problems.

So let's hear from 1 Peter 3:10 – 'For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech.'

**Thirdly**, Jesus will make a way through for you. It may not be the way you expect. We find out in the Bible with characters such as Daniel in the Lion's Den that God will bring you through but sometimes we need to go through the testing and trials. It's human, in a world where sin has taken such a hold.

You know what, I've been there in the place of struggle for some time. But be encouraged. Speaking to a wise Christian buddy recently, he told me something a Brazilian had told him, 'The greater the testing, the greater the burden and God's calling on your life.' Why did Moses spend so long in the desert? Why did Abraham? Why do Joseph spend 7 years in prison? The answer lies in the rest of their life. You see, when you struggle, you do something that is Biblical. God is working on your character and it's the place you need to be in. But we have hope, always. What does James say?

'Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.'

**Fourthly**, there will come a time of restoration. Again, this is Biblical. When we become a Christian, we are saved by Jesus. Our old life has gone and the new comes. This is restoration. One day Jesus will return and the universe in ways I don't understand will be renewed, re-built, restored.

Revelation 21.1-2 says, 'Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God..'

What a beautiful picture!

Psalm 30.4-5:

Sing to the LORD , you saints of his;  
praise his holy name.  
For his anger lasts only a moment,  
but his favour lasts a lifetime;  
weeping may remain for a night,  
but rejoicing comes in the morning.

**Finally**, good can come from your struggles, if you allow it to. Let's think about Jesus. OK, so he knew what his calling was, probably knew where to go next and when. But the people forced Jesus out of the town. Persecution helped the early church grow and spread throughout the world today. A recent report from a foreign government in a country where Christians are persecuted concluded that the best way to stop Christianity growing was to tolerate it. They found that with great persecution came great Christian growth. The same can be said for you.