

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. All right, I'm going to start with a gospel lesson here. Right now we're talking about Jesus going back home. The young man made good and He's coming back to His hometown. And so He starts preaching in the synagogue, which is seemingly the first time that He's done it in His hometown, His home area. And people of course respond with enthusiasm and what ... It is amazing that this young man that they knew as a little child finally came home and look what He's done. What it should have been. Rather, instead they looked at Him and said, "Isn't He that carpenter? Basically isn't He a guy? He's a construction worker. I mean, He works with stone and He works with wood and He builds houses." They're basically saying, "What in the world does a construction worker know? Yeah, sure. He did great signs. We believe it. We believe it when we see it."

In other words, they looked at his past and they refused to accept His words of wisdom because they knew Him and they didn't care about the words. They were more interested in who He was rather than what He was saying. And in their mind, who He was was a simple construction worker. He had nothing to offer them. And so it says that, "Jesus could not do any mighty signs except lay His hands on a few people and heal them." What in the world are mighty signs, if not laying your hands on somebody and healing them? What mighty signs are we talking about that He could not do if He could still heal some people? I mean, it just kind of blows your mind on what that might be. And He marveled at their unbelief. He marveled that they refused to listen to Him. And so He goes out and He spreads a word to other people who will hear Him. "A prophet is without honor in his own town."

Now we have this story in Ezekiel of a prophet, and this prophet also is called by God and enlightened by the Holy Spirit and he is there called to preach from Babylon. So he's in captivity and he's called to preach to Babylon and he's called to preach to the people who are left in Israel, but he's not called to necessarily be all that successful and neither was Jesus. Many people refused to believe him. One of the more challenging things that we have here in all of these lessons is that people are going to be judged not upon what they speak and what the Word of God says through them, but rather on people's preconceived notions and what they want to hear. And so Ezekiel was preaching to a group of people who refused to listen, who rebelled against God, who God even calls stubborn, who don't want to hear, and they're a nation of rebels.

And yet God still calls Ezekiel to preach to them because in doing so, some of them will be called to repentance. You see, we need to understand, and this is really, I think, a cautionary tale for most of us pastors and preachers because as much as we like to think we've crafted a beautiful sermon, and if people just heard

it, they would definitely believe in God. The reality of the matter is it's not always going to happen. And quite frankly, it's not about me or anybody else. I mean, part of the reason that pastors wear these robes and these stoles is to hide the person. In other words, when you look at me, you should see the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church. You should not see Patrick. You just see the pastor. And when I retire and take a call somewhere in the future, somebody else is going to stand in this pulpit. They're going to wear the robes and you're going to see the pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, and that's what you should be looking at because it's not about the man.

Ezekiel probably was a good speaker, but it wasn't him that communicated the Word of God. It was the Spirit that came into him that enabled him to speak God's Word. Paul, although he was brilliant, I mean, as he says, "I could boast and I wouldn't be a fool if I did it." I mean, Paul was a brilliant man. If he were alive today, he'd have like 10,000 letters behind his name. He is one of those guys who was just superior in his intellect, and yet he does not boast about himself, but he boasts about Christ. He boasts about the Word of God because it's not about Paul. It's not about Ezekiel. It's not about Patrick. It's about Jesus Christ and His word come to us. I mean, if Jesus Christ can be rejected and He's right there in front of you and He's healing people and laying hands on you, then what do we expect from everybody else?

See, we are called to be faithful to the Word of God and not worry about the consequences or about whether anybody converts or not. We're just called to be faithful. We're called to put our trust in God's Word and what it has done for us and what it continues to do through us. We're encouraged in fact, to spread the gospel everywhere, knowing that many will reject, knowing that many are not going to hear, but we don't worry about that. That's the Holy Spirit's job to convict and to bring about repentance.

So Jesus could not do mighty works in His hometown. What were the mighty works? The mighty works were repentance. His message was that of repentance. "Repent of your sins and believe." The same message of John the Baptist. It's the same message of all the Old Testament prophets. "Repent of your sins and believe. Believe that God has saved you from those sins. Believe that God has redeemed you." And so we're called to focus upon the word, but the people refused. And so the mighty work that Christ was not able to do in His hometown was that of bringing people into the faith because they were stubborn, they refused to listen, and so the Spirit could not enter because they would not listen. It's not that Jesus lost His power or wasn't powerful enough to do what He wanted to do. It was that we can reject that power, sadly enough.

And so it behooves us to pray that God would always keep us in His Word. I mean, I've often said this before, don't listen to a single word that I ever tell you. Don't believe me. Don't believe anything I say unless it conforms to what God's Word has already said. Because you should not follow me because of me. You should follow what I teach because it is the Word of God, and the Word of God is going to do the work in you. The Word of God is going to strengthen you. The Word of God is going to be with you in all of your calamities and your heartaches and your hard times in life. Especially in the difficulties of your life, you can find comfort because I mean, let's face it, we don't like to deal with the pain and the sorrow and the suffering that we go through in this world, and we'd like to think that hopefully there's a purpose in all of this.

Well, I'm here to tell you, there is. Not that God designed you to be suffering, but because you suffer because of sin in this world, because of the fallen nature and the broken nature of this world, we suffer. But in our suffering, what do we discover? In our suffering, we discover the strength of God's Word. We discover that we are weak, but even in our weakness, Christ is strong. We discover who He really is and what He really has done for us. And so we can rejoice and even brag about our weaknesses as Paul did because in our weaknesses, we recognize that God shines through even more and better because it's not about us. It's about Him in us. And so we can go forth and share that gospel. We can go forth and be confident even in the midst of the sorrows and the pains confident that God's Word is still with us. And we can pray that God would continue to send faithful leaders into our midst, that they might guide and direct us in the truth so that we might be able to stand firm in the day of trial.

Paul had some amazing things happen to him. He saw visions, he saw wonders, he saw Jesus Christ himself in a vision as he's going on his way to Damascus, he saw miracles performed in his presence. But again, it was never about Paul. It's always about Christ working through Paul, Christ working through Ezekiel, Christ working through me, Christ working through you, that we might be the hands and the feet of the gospel of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So I encourage you to ask God to show you the great and mighty works that He has done, that they might be real in your mind, that you might always keep them in your forefront. Remembering each and every day that you have been baptized, that you have been drowned, your sinful nature is dead. And Christ has raised you to new life in Him, and that His righteousness is your righteousness, and that His strength is your strength, and that His gifts are your gifts, so that you never need to be afraid, you never need to doubt, you never need worry about God's love for you. Nor do you need to be concerned about how you present yourself to others. Just be who you are in Christ and trust the Holy Spirit to do the work, and pray that the

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Holy Spirit might work through you and in you because God tells us to scatter the seed far and wide. Ezekiel [inaudible 00:11:20] to a rebellious nation. Why?

Because some of them would hear the word and repent and believe, and we trust God to do that today. So let us be faithful in word and deed and let us trust in the midst of our weakness that we find strength in His Word to get through each and every day until we meet Him again in paradise. May that grace and that mercy and that strength be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen. We confess the faith that God has given to us, in the words of the Apostles Creed, page 159, please rise.