



Service Theme: God's Blessings Do Not Run Out

Epiphany 4 - January 29/30, 2021

Sermon Theme: *Can Joseph's Son Lead Us to Victory?*

1. *Not for those who doubt; 2. Only for those who believe*

Sermon Text: Luke 4: 21-32

²¹ He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

²² 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. ²³ Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself!' And you will tell me, 'Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'"

²⁴ "Truly I tell you," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. ²⁷ And there were many in Israel with leprosy^[a] in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸ All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. ²⁹ 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 off the cliff. ³⁰ But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. ³¹ Then he went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath he taught the people. ³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, dear Christian friends,

Expectations are part of daily life. Here in Minnesota, we expect snow on the ground in January and sun up in the sky in July. We expect to receive fast food at the pick-up window, after placing our order in the drive-thru. And in the upcoming Super Bowl, you can be sure that every star, starter, scrub, coach, and staff member expects to win this important game.

But, it's a cold and cruel fact: we don't always get what we expect. It doesn't always snow in January and it often rains in July. Communication in the drive-thru can get garbled and we may not get exactly what we ordered. Even in the Super Bowl, only one team will leave the field with a victory.



For Americans, the Super Bowl is the most watched game of the year, over 90 million viewers. Very few NFL teams have advanced to the big game without a strong quarterback who can lead them to victory. The team that calls itself a champion needs a real leader. It has to count on someone who can lead them down the field and, if necessary, score the go-ahead touchdown in the final moments of the game. This go-to-guy must live up to great expectations.

Of course, we haven't huddled up here in church to talk about a football game. We've come together to talk about life, reality, and most importantly, about eternity. We're not just passive fans on the sideline, watching the game of life go by as time clicks off the clock. We're actively engaged as God's people. We're on offense, fighting to keep our families together. And we're on defense, plugging the holes caused by sin and its consequences.

You know our opponents. And they have nothing to do with the NFC North Division. There's the "high-stepping" world that would have us buy into flashy philosophy like "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow you die". There's the "trash-talking" devil who far too often brings out the worst in us and knows just what buttons to push. And let's not forget our own worst enemy, our sinful nature which tries to make us self-centered and greedy.

Can we expect to win? The stakes are high. Our happiness now and even our eternity is on the line. Who can we count on to lead us? Who will rescue us from every setback and snatch us from the jaws of defeat? I guess what I'm really asking is this, **Can Joseph's Son Lead Us to Victory?** Can even this same Jesus, the one revealed this Epiphany as the son of Joseph & Mary and strong son of God lead us to victory? Holy Scripture answers definitively: Not for those who doubt! But, only for those who believe, as the apostle Paul says: ***He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (I Corinthians 15:57).*** Yes, only Jesus can and will lead us to victory, now and forever..

Let's return to an event early in Jesus' ministry that proves that He's our go-to-guy and our world's MVP. Our reading kicks-off this way: ***(v20) 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, (v21) and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus had just finished reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Can't you just see Him? When Jesus walked back to his seat in the synagogue, he was the focus of every single person in the room.. Now, Jesus makes a bold claim. Like a quarterback who throws the long bomb on the opening play of the game, Jesus announced His presence with authority this way. He identified Himself as the one who fulfilled Isaiah's prophesy. In other words, He was saying: "I'm the guy. I'm the guy Isaiah was talking about. God sent me here for you as the Messiah, the one you've been waiting for since the world began. Here I am." Pretty bold claim. You probably could have heard a pin drop that day. He was claiming to be more than the Number 1 Draft Choice in the NFL. He was claiming to be the Savior. And Jesus wasn't going to lead people to heaven by having them follow His perfect example. He was going to lead us to heaven by taking our place on the cross as our substitute and paying out debt of sins in full.

Initially, the people seemed to be impressed. ***(v22) All spoke well of Him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from His lips.*** They wanted what He was offering. They were the poor who needed good news. They were the prisoners who needed freedom. They were the blind who needed sight. Spiritually speaking, they were all these things because of sin: poor, prisoners, and blind just like us. But, they lost the big picture. They allowed their past experiences and their present reason to cloud their faith in Him.

Our reading continues: ***(v22) "Isn't this Joseph's son," they asked?*** When they remembered Jesus' family tree, they reversed their position. After all, They KNEW him. They knew him as Joseph's son, the son of a lowly carpenter. How could HE be the Messiah? How could HE lead them to victory? From their perspective, Jesus didn't have a good pre-season. He seemed to start out slow. Born into poverty, not prominence. Jesus didn't attend the right Division One school, nor hang out with the right people. His only claim to fame seemed to be talking with a bunch of rabbis in the temple at age 12. But, then again, humility doesn't always make the headlines, does it? All this, Jesus did to become one of us, to serve under God's law, to save us.



So, Jesus warned them. Don't expect me to live up to Your idea of a Savior. Their idea of a Savior was one who would save them from the Romans, to do miracles on demand. He confronted the flaw in their thinking - that His Word was trustworthy only if it was backed up by "big plays" or miracles they thought he should do. His record spoke for itself. He had proved His authority by performing many miracles in the past, which proved His power as the Son of God. He was qualified to be the Savior of the world.

But, they ignored His warnings. They rejected Him. They booed His abilities. They didn't think they were that bad and didn't feel they needed a Savior from sin. So, they tried to get rid of Him. They didn't want to cut him, trade him, or release him. They wanted to kill him. What sad commentary on what unbelief is capable of (v29) ***29 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 off the cliff. 30 But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.*** Could this Joseph's Son, lead them to victory? Jesus makes it clear, not to those who doubt.

It's easy for us to point fingers at the people of Nazareth, and diagram their mistakes like a Monday morning quarterback after the big game. Here they had the "home field advantage" of speaking directly to Jesus, and even then they still rejected Him. Yet, how easily we can reject Jesus, in quiet, almost polite ways. We can distort who Jesus is and what He has come to do. God has given us the privilege of prayer where we can speak directly with Him every day. But, do we? Maybe to ask him for stuff, but to thank him for every blessing? Each of us has a tendency to treat Jesus like a genie in a bottle granting our every wish. It's almost as if Jesus is like a fast-food drive-thru with a clown face and a microphone, instead of the LORD with all authority. "Give me a hamburger, fries, and an easy life, LORD - to go!" Like the citizens of Nazareth, we want a miraculous answer to prayer to validate our faith. We want more than words, forgetting God's blessings don't run out. If God doesn't act on our terms, we doubt Him and His gracious promises. We can actually reject Christ when we do not let Him be who He is, our LORD and our Savior. Today, He speaks to us in both the stinging words of the Law and comforting words of the Gospel we need to hear, not just want we



want to hear. We can only pray with the tax collector in the temple: God, be merciful to me a sinner.

Can Joseph's Son lead us to victory? Jesus makes this offer of victory only to those who believe. In the final words of our reading, we hear the rest of Jesus' game plan. ***(v31) Then Jesus went down to Capernaum, a town in Galilee, and on the Sabbath, he taught the people. (v32) They were amazed at His teaching, because His teaching had authority.*** Jesus moved on. He took His Gospel to others. Jesus' plan never included arguing people into heaven. If people don't want heaven, Jesus won't force them.

Instead of his own hometown, Jesus now went down the road to Capernaum. Here we witness the incredible power of God's Word. How did the people react this time? This time, by God's Grace, the people didn't reject His word. They took it to heart and believed. By the Holy Spirit's power, they applied Jesus' words of forgiveness and salvation. They took Jesus at His Word with a simple child-like faith, a faith that trusts him completely.

My friends, Jesus pleads with us to do the same! The Bible says very clearly: Believe and be baptized. And you WILL be saved. Jesus wants us to have that same child-like faith. He wants us to trust Him completely, as a 4-year-old trusts his father when that father says in the swimming pool at New Ulm Rec Center: "jump into my arms, I'll catch you!" Faith is simply agreeing to what God says. Yes, I'm a sinner who deserves eternal punishment for my every sin. And yes, I have a Savior Jesus who paid for my every sin when He shed his blood on the cross to earn salvation for me and every sinner. We agree because God said it. Take Jesus at His Word. Don't demand miracles as proof for God's promises. And continue to strengthen Your faith in Jesus by hearing His Word each week here at St. Paul's and reading our Bibles at home.

On Super Bowl Sunday, only one of two teams will win a very important piece of jewelry, a Super Bowl ring. I'm sure it must be quite a thrill to wear it, knowing what it cost. But, you and I have a better piece of jewelry as Christian believers, don't we? With the prophets and saints of God, we can look forward to the end

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of our season knowing God will graciously award us with the crown of righteousness, signifying we have heaven with Jesus. We have it right now, no matter what happens in the Super Bowl. And that Bible fact is worth cheering for and singing praises to our God, all because Joseph's son Jesus leads us to victory. Amen.

