

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,²¹ and 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! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

²⁴ “I tell you the truth,” 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 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 down 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 began to teach the people.³² They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority. (NIV84)

Theme: Listening is Believing.

1. The gospel doesn’t need a sign.
2. The gospel moves from place to place.

“Seeing is believing.” At least, that is what the old phrase tells us. If you see something, than you believe it—and if you don’t, than you have your doubts. Of course nowadays, with all the tricks one can use, just because you see something doesn’t mean you believe it. You’re skeptical whenever you see something—you wonder if some sort of magic was involved or if the video you watched was fake. If seeing no longer means believing—what about hearing? If you hear about something, do you automatically believe it?

The people of Nazareth were skeptical when they heard Jesus speak. For them it wasn’t enough that Jesus claimed to be the promised Messiah—they wanted proof. Hearing wasn’t believing for them. But

for us hearing the Word is all we need. For Christians listening is believing. The gospel is all we need. And the gospel moves one when it is no one listens.

Our gospel for today is connected to last week’s gospel. Jesus was in his hometown of Nazareth. He entered the Synagogue and they asked him to speak on a portion of Scripture. They handed the scroll of Isaiah. So Jesus read, **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.** This is a prophecy of how the promised Messiah would come and save those who were captive to sin. After reading this Jesus sat down and said, **Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.** Jesus just called himself the promised Messiah. He was going to save the people from their sins.

The people were amazed that Jesus would say this. **“Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.** Nazareth was a small town. And like all small towns—everyone knew everyone else. They had seen Jesus grow up. They knew him from the time he was a little boy. And now, all of a sudden, he considered himself the promised Messiah?

They weren’t buying it—and Jesus knew. **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.** If you went to a doctor to get rid of some ailment and you noticed that he had the same thing you did—only worse, what would you do? You would want him to figure out the solution on himself first, before he did anything to you. The people of Nazareth felt the same way. They wanted Jesus to get the story about the Messiah straight first, and then he could tell them about God’s Word. So they wanted Jesus to prove what he said—prove that he was the promised Messiah. They heard what Jesus said about himself—but that wasn’t enough. They wanted him to perform miracles.

We too may look for signs. Not that any of us don’t believe that Jesus is the promised Messiah. But our sinful nature still has doubts about God’s Word. “Does God really love me? If he does, than why does he make me suffer the way I do? If he would just give me steady job,

heal my sickness, or reconcile me with my family members, than I would be sure.” We love to point out all the facts that prove the Bible is true—such as countless examples from archeology. We point to that thinking that it would convince others to the truth. The people of the world try to say that the world was formed through revolution. We may think, “If only God would give a more tangible proof of his creation, then more people would believe him. Or, “If only God would allow Noah’s ark to be found—than there would be no doubts as to the truth.”

Jesus refused to perform miracles for the people of Nazareth. Eventually they forced Jesus out of the synagogue and the city. They led him to the edge of a hill. And were going to push him off to his death. But in an ironic turn of events, Jesus showed them the miracle they had asked for earlier. He walked right through them. They had just forced him to the edge of his death. But then they couldn’t touch him, push him, or throw him off the cliff. They were powerless against him. He proved that he was God and the Messiah. But they didn’t care—by now, seeing was no longer believing because of them hearing wasn’t either.

Of course Jesus performed many miracles or signs throughout his life. None were greater than the one he performed three days after his death. He rose from the dead. Once a group of Pharisees came up to Jesus and asked him to perform a miraculous sign. Jesus responded, **A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.** Jonah was three days in the belly of the huge fish until he was spit out. Jesus’s dead body was three days in the earth until he came out on Easter. His resurrection is the sign that he truly is the Messiah. He truly did pay for our sins and freed from sin’s captivity—Just as Isaiah had prophesied about.

The Word is all we need. We don’t need any miracles. We don’t need any proof that God’s Word is true. We don’t need any signs from God to know that he loves us. Everything we need is already found in the Word. It is in his Word that we read about God’s love for us in sending his Son to die for his enemies. It is in his Word that we see the ultimate sign in Jesus’ resurrection. The Word is enough.

But sadly the Word isn’t enough for some. Jesus once told the Pharisees the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus. Lazarus died and went to heaven, while the rich man was sent to hell for his unbelief. Hell was so horrible that he asked to give a warning sign to his brothers so that they wouldn’t end up where he was. Abraham replied—they have God’s Word, let them read that. The rich man said that wouldn’t be good enough. He wanted to go back and warn them himself. To this Abraham replied, **If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.** The Pharisees were just like the people of Nazareth—they didn’t believe. Jesus gave them the ultimate sign, and they still rejected him.

Seeing wasn’t believing for them, because hearing the gospel wasn’t believing either. They heard gospel but they rejected it and asked for a sign. And so the gospel moved on to another place.

The spread of the gospel is often compared to a rain storm. When it rains, the storm doesn’t stay in one place. It moves on. It follows the wind currents. Typically if it rains west of here, we’ll get that rain to. That same storm will then move on into Canada and the Northeast. Rain waters one land, and moves on to the next. It moves from place to place.

So does the gospel. The gospel waters the desert of men’s souls in one area for a time. And then it moves on. It thrives for awhile in one place. Than it moves to another. In Isaiah God compares the spread of his gospel to rain. **As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.**

This is the point that Jesus was making to the people of Nazareth. Jesus mentions our first lesson. During a long and particularly harsh famine there were many Jewish widows who needed help. But God didn’t send Elijah to help any of them. But rather to a Gentile widow. During the time of Elisha there were many Jewish lepers in need of help. But God didn’t have Elisha help any of them. Rather he helped

an official from one of their enemy countries. Why? Because the Jews, as a whole, had rejected God's Word. And so the gospel was sent to others. It moved from the Jews to the Gentiles. It is taken away from all those who didn't believe what they heard. Jesus proved his own point after he walked away from the cliff. He kept walking—Just like a rain storm keeps going after it leave the area. Jesus went into another Jewish town, on the Sea of Galilee, called Capernaum. There he preached God's Word. They heard, listened, and believed. As Luke tells us in verse 32, **They were amazed at his teaching, because his message had authority.**

History proves Jesus right. For thousands of years the Jews had the truth. But they rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Again and again they failed to listen to the Word. So at the time of Jesus, the gospel began to be spread to the Gentiles. The Apostles and others spread out from Israel. Some with south into Africa. Others went east to Asia. Paul and others went west toward Europe—Paul himself made it as far as Spain.

Over time the gospel was lost in Asia in favor of the spiritism of the eastern religions. The Middle East was overrun by Islam. Africa too went after false gods. Although Europe was dominated by Roman Catholic teachings, it was one area where the gospel could still be heard. Then the gospel was brought to the Americas. Christianity spread quickly in the new world, while the gospel lost ground in Europe. And now things are coming full circle. Each year there are less and less Christians in Europe. America too has less Christians today than 10 years ago. But Africa is growing as far as Christianity is concerned. And it is growing by leaps and bounds in Asia. The gospel is like rain. It waters one land for awhile, the passes on to place after place.

We have the pure gospel. We have the Word. We don't need signs. We don't need any proof that it is true. For the Holy Spirit works through that Word. And through that Word he convinces us that it is true. So we don't only hear the Word by we listen to it attentively. Because for us, hearing is believing.

The Word is all we need. The gospel is all we need. It shows us the truth. It tells us about Christ. It comforts us through the message of forgiveness and eternal life through the work of our one and only

Savior. There is nothing else that can give us such comfort. No matter who we listen to, only the gospel can show us our Savior. So we go back to the Word time and time again. For we don't want it to pass us by.

We don't need to see to believe. For us, by the power of the Holy Spirit, hearing is believing. For the gospel is the message of our Savior. The one who came to fulfill the prophecies of the Messiah. The one who frees us from slavery of sin. Yes, hearing is truly believing. Amen.