

**I Cor. 13:1-13  
Luke 4:21-30**

**Jan. 31, 2010  
Bakersfield**

## **"Home Town Boy"**

### **Introduction**

**Last week I spoke about Nehemiah (from the Old Testament) and how he led the people of Israel on the important and large task of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. We discovered that clear purpose, godly character, and unity were key components of his success. We also saw how much of what he faced and did is similar to our situation today and that purpose, godly character, and unity are just as vital today as they were way back in Nehemiah's time. It is a lesson brought to us again – this time in Jesus; God's own son – the Messiah and our Savior.**

### **Purpose**

**Jesus came to his home town of Nazareth and joined in the worship of God, right there in the synagogue. He read from that well-known passage of Scripture, in the prophet Isaiah, and interpreted it as a leader who shared a dream with God. He envisioned the living out of those Scriptures, in the present. He said the "acceptable year of the Lord," envisioning people reconciled to their Maker. The fulfillment of this vision had been awaited for hundreds of years and people expected a great leader, a savior, to bring it to reality. With conviction he repeated the words of Scripture, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" and then saying, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Make no mistake here, *by saying this* Jesus claimed the mantle of Messiah.**

**When Jesus preached in his hometown it all started out so well and ended up so ugly. What happened at Nazareth? Were people angry that he claimed the role of messiah, as the leaders of Israel would be in the coming years? Perhaps some at Nazareth resented his calling and role. Perhaps, though, it was something more mundane which caused his home church to turn on him.**

**While he spoke in the synagogue his own people were initially pleased and they probably said something like this, "What a blessing he is to us, here in Nazareth. Isn't he the son of Joseph, a man of this town? Great to have such a promising, hometown boy. He'll be great for our community and we'll greatly profit."**

**Maybe that's what they said, but in their hearts they were already blaming him. He could work miracles, yeah great, but why all those good works among strangers and foreigners, why didn't he start here first? Charity begins at home you know. Besides, wasn't he Joseph's son, wasn't he one of them, so didn't he belong to them? Maybe those folks didn't say it but they were thinking it. He**

**should be ashamed of himself. He's got an attitude problem, needs to change himself, needs to heal himself, he ought to stick closer to home.**

**Jesus *was* one of them, enough so that he understood very well their thoughts. So he said, "No doubt you want to tell me, do *here* what you did over *there*." In other words, stay here; restrict yourself to your own kind.**

**"No doubt you want to ask me, when you gave them that wine over there in Cana, what were you thinking? How could you forget about us, haven't we been drinking with you all these years, and yet you don't care about all the thirsty people in Nazareth?"**

**"No doubt you want to ask me, while you were healing all those people in Capernaum, what message did that send to our sick people here? How do you think they felt when they heard you were healing elsewhere, spending your time and talent in far-off places? Shame on you!"**

**They took the attitude that causes almost all the trouble in this world. They wanted him to identify with his kin only. We know it as tribalism, nepotism, or elitism. But he told them that kind of sin should have disappeared by now, even the prophets of old knew it was a thing of the past. Isaiah spoke of a light to the nations and the glory of the Lord shining on all. [Jeremiah was called by God to be "a prophet to the nations" appointed over nations and kingdoms "to pluck up and to pull down . . . to build and to plant."] God's message of salvation is so big it's got to be spread abroad and spread through many people.**

**Jesus reminded them of the Scriptures and their own traditions telling how God's love was extended to those outside their own circles. [Look at Elijah (Elijah's story is found in I Kings, 17-19). There were many starving widows with orphans in his day, in Israel. But he did not help them; he helped a foreign widow in Zarephath. Then look at Elisha (I Kings 19ff). There were many lepers in his day, suffering in Israel. But he did not help them; rather he helped an alien, Naaman, of Syria.] When they had heard all this they got furious, their approval turned to rage, not because he claimed to be a prophet, or even messiah. They were angry because Jesus had cut them to the heart.**

**Telling the truth from the beginning led him to the brow of a hill. He had the mettle to face the crowds, walk through the midst of them, and be on his way. Jesus knew his purpose – to be God's messiah for all people; and so he is. And He has a purpose for us: to join him in the salvation of the nations. Of course we are not messiahs, but we are his agents and representatives in this world.**

**Too often our faith is defensive. We get together and defend what we've been doing for a few thousand years. Shouldn't we be considering strategies that take us out there into the world and demonstrate the power and validity of what we're preaching? Yes, we've got things like buildings and budgets and communities to build and maintain. We've got traditions and pipe organs and all kinds of stuff to maintain. But are those things our main purpose? Or can He**

**use those things, even as He uses us, to fulfill our purpose: to bring people to the transforming power of Jesus?**

**Those whom we seek to bring to the transforming power of Jesus will come from all walks of life, even from all nations. Of course when we allow new people into this fellowship it can always be a little challenging – because they won't necessarily see things the way they've been seen for the last number of years. It's human nature, I guess; we always try to confine things to what we're used to or what's common in our community. Yet isn't our true community with Jesus? Don't we share in common what Jesus is doing in our lives? That's where character comes in.**

### **Character**

**Jesus' godly character carried him through that crowd when it turned ugly. He didn't get all angry and call down fire and brimstone from heaven when the folks rejected him. He could have. Nope, he just walked through their midst and on about his work as Messiah – his path to glory.**

**When things don't go as we'd hoped or planned we can get upset, blame others, stomp out, or whatever. But we can also call upon the power of Jesus – like Nehemiah, "Lord, strengthen my hand" – to shore up our fortitude and keep us focused on our true purpose. Godly character is what carries on the purpose when the going is rough. And here's the paradox: when you stick to your true purpose it always builds character. We have a purpose here: it's stated in our mission statement. We want to carry out that purpose, with the character of Christ as much as we are able, in season and out. Even as we go forward we can go with love for one another and a care to reach out to others who do not yet know him. Yes, we're marching uphill right now as a congregation, but we can ask him to go with us. He can love into us his strength of character so that we can not only complete a building, we can also build a genuine body of believers here to be His body.**

**We often say "amen" after singing hymns and almost always after a prayer. In the Bible "amen" has deeper dimensions than as the concluding word of prayer. It goes beyond agreement. To say "amen" is an affirmation and a commitment. When Jesus speaks to us he's not only authoritative, he's committed. Jesus agrees with God and he's committed to us to such a degree that he'll die for us. There's an aspect of faith in our responding "amen" to Jesus. Our response to him doesn't mean we understand all that he says. Jesus might even make us angry, as he did his fellow citizens. However, we speak our "amen" in response, entrusting ourselves to him even in suffering -- as he entrusted himself to us enough to suffer for our sakes. Character counts.**

### **Unity (One Body)**

**Purpose and character bring us together and we're held together through him. The sacrificial love that he displays and gives is the cement that holds together all the pieces – I should say people – in the body of Christ. Now 1 Corinthians 13 – the chapter on love - is often read in churches at various occasions. It is a favorite among Christians, and even some non-believers – especially at weddings. People love to talk about love and how we should love one another. But please understand what Paul wrote in this “love chapter.” He wrote about Jesus' love. That's not sentimental or romantic love; but the kind of love God practices. Slide -**

**Love is not superficial sentimentality but is tough and must sometimes be uncompromising. Sometimes it's hard to identify love within things that hurt. How does the crucifixion show God's love for human beings? Perhaps St. Paul had the answer when he said that love doesn't rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. He went on to say that love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things, and that love never ends. Jesus showed that great love on the cross by enduring the worst human beings can endure without resorting to hatred or blame. That's the love that binds us to him and binds us to one another.**

### **Conclusion**

**It's not always easy to make the changes necessary for Him to be seen and heard by the next generations. It's uncomfortable to move in a new way we've never gone before, in order to follow Him. It's challenging to consider our purpose for Him in a way we'd not considered before. Maybe it was too difficult for those folks in Nazareth. I guess they just couldn't see the need for change, let alone themselves as agents of change, so they said to him "If you don't want us, if you don't want us the way we say, we don't want you. Drop dead." They tried to lynch him. But the Scripture says he passed through their midst and went away. That's the way it is when folks don't choose to follow Christ, he just passes on through and goes away.**

**He went away to other places, other people to share God's grace. He went away from Nazareth to find people like us. He went away from Nazareth to find people not like us, yet who also needed his grace. God's grace is what makes it possible to truly care about another. God's grace, the love we know in Jesus, has a transforming power in our lives. Our mission here is to bring people to His transforming power – do you know that power in your life? That's the real purpose of all our efforts around here. Let's be sure he doesn't pass on through our midst.**

**Purpose, character, and unity: how firm a foundation you have laid for us, O God, in the person of Jesus. How strong your promise to walk with us through dissenting clique and crowd. How uncompromising your plan for a better way of living. Thank you God.**

**What's really exciting about all this is that God has meant our lives to be rich and full, and he wants us on his team to make this world where His genuine love of each person is known; where lives are saved from the disabling effects of addictions, broken relationships, and lost hope; where people can be redeemed from purposelessness, shoddy character, and disunity.**

**He's here, ready to meet you and to meet me and to carry us forward. The purpose he gives, the character he shapes, and the unity he builds will bring us all to glorify God.**