Christmas is only 2 weeks away and the shopping frenzy is in full swing.  In fact, statistics state that department stores make 70-90% of their yearly profits between thanksgiving and Christmas.  In fact, the amount spent by Americans on gifts this year is estimated to be nearly $465 billion. Currently about 18% of Americans go to church on a weekly basis throughout the year.  But that number changes drastically around Christmas.  47% of Americans go to a Christmas service.  Christ is rejected.

A large percentage of millennials (47%) who grew up in church are leaving.  But concurrently, there is a growth occurring in so called “churches” around the country.  Churches that preach a self-serving message.  Churches that preach a message that following Christ will bring you wealth and health every great earthly thing.  Church services where the worship looks like a self-exalting rock show than a congregational worship to a Holy and righteous God.  Christ is being rejected.

So it leads us to the question, what does it take for Christ to be accepted?

Luke 4:14-30

Just from reading this passage, we immediately are inclined to ask ourselves, “what happened!?”  How did the situation turn so violently?  What caused a seemingly peaceful moment into one that was so filled with rage?  What could have caused Jesus to be rejected in this way?

Vs 14 speaks clearly that Jesus, returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit.  Before we go any further, it is important to recognize that Luke mentions Jesus being filled in the Spirit or operating in the Spirit more than any other book.  In fact, if we step back and apply it to our lives, how often to we approach our individual ministry with prayer. How often do we pray for our families, our children, our co-workers, our community?

     - A great preacher once said, “prayer doesn’t do anything, God does everything.”  Prayer isn't about asking for things we desire.  Prayer is lining one’s self up with Gods heart and God’s desires.

Vs16 says that he came back to Nazareth his hometown and as was his custom he entered the synagogue on the Sabbath.  Now it's very important to recognize that Nazareth was his hometown.  This is where he grew up, the people in Nazareth knew who he was, they knew who his family was.  They knew him as joseph's son, they knew him as Mary's boy, the little boy who grew up right before their eyes.  We can imagine that these people saw Jesus playing as a child, building with his dad who was a carpenter.  They were very familiar with Jesus but the Jesus who returned to Nazareth was not the little boy that they knew.  This was Jesus the God-Man stepping into His ministry filled with the Spirit.

Now the verse says, that Jesus went to the synagogue as was his custom.  Worship in the synagogue was like what we are doing here except with some differences.  There was no singing necessarily but there was an order to the service.  Every week service started with the “Shema” which was a quoting of Deuteronomy 6 stating that they with love the Lord their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength.  That was followed by a corporate group prayer.  That was then followed by a reading from the Pentateuch which is the first 5 books of the Bible (genesis, exodus, Leviticus, numbers, Deuteronomy).  After a time spent reading from the Pentateuch, another reading was done from the prophets.  These are some of the minor books of the Bible in the Old Testament that we often overlook (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Micah).  There was then a subsequent teaching that followed the reading that was often done by the reader of the prophets.  So today in Nazareth, Jesus, for the first time in his hometown synagogue, was given the scroll to read from the prophets and to speak.

     -  Jesus is given the scroll of the prophets to read and he's given Isaiah.  Jesus then finds Isaiah 61 and begins to read.  Now this could have been part of the sequential order that they were going in or this could simply have been Jesus finding it on his own, we really don't know.  But Jesus opens the scroll and goes to Isaiah 61 and reads (Read vs 18-20).  As he sat down all the eyes in the entire synagogue were fixed on him.  Why would they be so firmly fixed on Jesus for reading such a familiar passage?  The reason is because Jesus did not read the entirety of the passage.  When I say he didn't read it in it's entirety, I mean he stopped in the middle of a sentence and closed the scroll and sat down.

     - Let's turn our bibles to Isaiah 61:1-2.  Vs 2…here's what Jesus left out…Why would he only talk about the salvation and leave out the part about the vengeance?  Now in order to fully grasp this we have to understand the mindset of the Jewish people he was speaking to.  They hated the gentiles, they hated their oppressors.  They were literally waiting for generations, hundreds of years, for a messiah to bring vengeance on their oppressors.  It was a common belief among the Jews that the messiah would come and bring vengeance on those who enslaved them.  So when they heard Jesus literally read half the verse and then sit down, all their eyes were fixed on Him.

          -  Jesus read half the verse because the favorable year of the Lord was occurring in their midst.  And though they wanted vengeance, that was not what Jesus was there for.  He was there to bring salvation to the spiritually poor, captive, and blind.  He was there to bring the gospel to the poor.

          -  the original language uses the word ptochos when describing “poor”. The word literally means to cringe or cower.  Jesus came for the person that recognizes how bankrupt they are, that they can barely look at the face of whom their hand stretched out to.  Jesus came for that person.  Mathew 5:3 says blessed are the poor in spirit for yours is the kingdom of God.  He came for the spiritually poor

         -  He was there to proclaim release of the captives. The Greek word here for the word release is aphesis.  Aphesis literally means forgiveness.  Anybody who is in prison is there because somebody put them there.  They are there because they wronged somebody.  In the spiritual sense we are imprisoned because we are a sinful people.  We have sinned against a holy God.  Jesus is saying to the synagogue that day that he has come to speak forgiveness and release to captive, to the prisoner.

Vs 25-26…The Jews in the synagogue were also very familiar with his story.  In the time of Elijah, about 850 BC, there was a very wicked king, this kings name was Ahab.  Ahab was married to a woman, her name was Jezebel. Jezebel was a worshiper of the idol Baal.  Because of Jezebels influence Ahab spread the worship of Baal throughout the land.  Elijah then announces a drought and there was a famine for 3 and a half years and because of that many people died.  And because many of the men died, there were many many widows in the land. Instead of ministering and helping any of the widows of the land, Elijah went to Sidon and ministered to a widow there.  The reason this is important is because Sidon was the hometown of Jezebel the idol worshipper….and the widow he went to was a gentile.  Elijah did not minister to any of the Jewish widows, but went to the gentile widow in the land of Jezebel.  That widow believed in the Lord and when Elijah came, he blessed her and she survived the famine.  But what was it about the woman that brought her salvation that day?  When Elijah came to her, she didn't ask for a sign….she didn't ask for wonders….she recognized that she was bankrupt…she recognized that she was destitute….she recognized that she needed a savior.

Vs 27… He goes on to tell a story of the prophet Elisha and the leper Naaman.  Now Elisha lived around the same time period and lived in a land that worshipped Baal as well.  And in that time there was predominance of leprosy.  Leprosy was a skin condition that there was no cure for.  It would literally eat one alive and parts of the body would start to even fall of from it.  Being a leper made one an outcast in the community and made you unfit for socialization.  Naaman was not just any man, he was soldier, a commander over a group of soldiers that attacked and pillaged Jews at that time.  So he was an enemy of the Jewish people and he was a gentile.  Elisha the prophet did not heal anyone in the land at that time but Naaman.  The reason he healed Naaman was not because of who he was…it was because he eventually recognized that he was bankrupt, that he was destitute and there was no other that could bring him salvation.

That was the final straw.  The Jews in the synagogue could not handle it anymore and they were filled with rage.  The same people who knew him….his friends, his family, his neighborhood….they got him up and were ready to throw him off a cliff to kill him…If everyone is rejecting Him, what does it mean to accept Him?

     -  What does the widow in Sidon and Namaan have, that these Jews didn't?  They were spiritually bankrupt and destitute….the Jews sat highly on who they were and what their bloodline was….the widow and Naaman didn't…they were at the end of their rope…they needed salvation because they recognized how impoverished they were. Jesus came to the synogoue that day to preach a message of salvation but it wasn’t just to the Jews…it wasn't for gentiles…it was one to anybody who is willing to turn from all other things and let everything go to grab a hold of Him.