

Mark 6:1-6  
Amazing Unbelief  
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The twelve disciples had just seen a series of events that dramatically demonstrated the power of Jesus. Jesus had stilled a storm at sea, delivered a man from a legion of demons, healed a woman with an incurable flow of blood, and raised a young girl from the dead. The twelve had also seen people respond to Jesus with faith. The healed demoniac was proclaiming the praises of Jesus throughout the Gentile region of Decapolis. The woman with the flow of blood had believed that she would be healed of her affliction if only she could touch the hem of Jesus' garment. Jairus, the synagogue official, had continued to believe in Jesus' power to restore his sick daughter even after he was told that his daughter was already dead. These people had believed in Jesus, and Jesus had done great miracles.

In our passage for today, the disciples witness something very different. In our passage for today, the disciples witness hardened unbelief, and they see firsthand the effect that unbelief can have on what Jesus does. The twelve accompany Jesus to His hometown of Nazareth, the town where Jesus was raised, and there they encounter unbelief. In this context of unbelief, Jesus largely performs no miracles. We read that Jesus did lay hands on a few sick people and heal them. These were probably desperately sick people who sought out Jesus in defiance of the prevailing attitude of unbelief in Nazereth. This was not at all like what had happened earlier at Capernaum after Jesus had

healed Peter's mother-in-law. In Capernaum, practically the whole city had gathered at the door of the house in Capernaum where Jesus was staying. They brought to Jesus all their sick and demon possessed, and Jesus healed them all. Nothing like that happened in Nazareth. Nothing like that happened in Nazareth because the people of Nazareth at large did not believe in Jesus.

So great was the unbelief in Nazareth that our text says that Jesus was amazed at the unbelief or marveled at the unbelief. The four gospels record only two events where Jesus was amazed at something. He was amazed at the faith of a Roman centurion who asked Jesus to heal one of his servants. The Roman centurion told Jesus that he understood how authority works. Jesus didn't have to trouble Himself to come to the Roman centurion's house where the sick servant was. The centurion sent the message to Jesus that he knew that all Jesus had to do was to say the word and his servant would be healed. The Roman centurion believed that Jesus had the necessary authority to effect healings, and Jesus was amazed at the depth of his faith. Jesus responded by saying that He had not seen such faith in all of Israel.

The other text where Jesus is amazed at something is our text for today. Here Jesus is in Israel among the covenant people. Here Jesus is in the town where He was raised. Here Jesus encounters unbelief, unbelief that quenches the Holy Spirit and that disables the miraculous power of Jesus. Our text says that Jesus could do no mighty work there and that Jesus marveled at this level of unbelief.

We will look at our text for today under three headings: credentials, contempt and consequences. First we will look at Jesus' credentials. On the first Sabbath after Jesus arrived in Nazareth, He attended worship at the synagogue there and preached a sermon. In response, the people commented on Jesus' wisdom and works. They said,

"Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands!

They no doubt had heard of many of the mighty works that Jesus had done in Capernaum, which was only about twenty miles away, and elsewhere. Where did Jesus get the wisdom to do these things?

We get a little more insight into the response of the people to Jesus' sermon in Luke's account:

Luke 4:22

22 So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. ...

The evidences of Jesus' wisdom were the gracious words which proceeded out of Jesus' mouth as He preached.

As an aside, let me comment that some people think that Luke is talking about an earlier visit to Nazareth and that Matthew and Mark are talking about a later visit to Nazareth. Some people think this because Luke tells about this visit to Nazareth at the

beginning of his account of Jesus' greater Galilean ministry, and Matthew and Mark tell about it later in their accounts of Jesus' greater Galilean ministry. Even so, I think Luke is talking about the same event because there are so many similarities between the accounts and there are no contradictions in the accounts that would imply two visits. The different order is not surprising because Matthew, Mark and Luke don't always put events in strict chronological order. Luke chose to tell about Jesus' visit to His home town as an introduction to his account of Jesus' greater Galilean ministry. Luke gave no indication as to when this event actually took place in the greater Galilean ministry. Mark, on the other hand, does give a pretty clear time marker. He closes chapter five with the account of the raising of the daughter of Jairus from the dead in Capernaum. And then Mark immediately says,

Mark 6:1

1 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him.

So Mark lets us know specifically when Jesus' visit to Nazareth happened, and Luke gives us a much longer account with more details.

Getting back now to our main train of thought, we see that the people of Nazareth responded to Jesus' sermon by acknowledging that Jesus had wisdom. Wisdom is skill in pious and ethical living rooted in a proper understanding of the word of God. They also acknowledged that Jesus actually had performed in other places the mighty miracles they had heard about.

This combination of wisdom and works is very significant. Back before the Bible was completed, God periodically raised up prophets with new revelation. This is no longer true today because Jesus has completed God's revelation, and this revelation from Jesus was put in written form in the New Testament. The inspired revelation which we have in the completed Bible is all that we will need until Christ returns. Yet back when the Bible was not yet complete and when God was giving added revelation, wisdom and works were validating signs that someone was a messenger from God with new revelation.

It was not enough to perform mighty works. One also had to have the wisdom. I won't read the passage, but Deuteronomy chapter 13 says that even if a prophet came and performed some sign or wonder, he was to be rejected as a true prophet if he taught some error such as the worship of idols. Mighty works alone were not enough. A true prophet also had to have the wisdom. That is, his teaching had to be consistent with God's previous revelation.

This validating combination of wisdom and works goes all the way back to Moses who spoke to Israel the words which God gave Him and also performed in God's power great signs and wonders. God promised Moses that He would one day raise up a prophet like unto Moses.

Deuteronomy 18:18-19

- 18 'I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.
- 19 'And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus is the great fulfillment of this promise. Notice the warning in the passage about any who will not listen to this special Prophet like unto Moses. Whoever will not heed the words from God which this prophet speaks in God's name, God will require it of him.

The people of Nazareth acknowledged that Jesus had this special wisdom from God, but they questioned how Jesus obtained this. If we look at the account of this event found in Luke's gospel, we can see that they should have known the answer to their question. Jesus had answered that question in His sermon. Jesus read the opening verses of Isaiah 61, which are a prophecy that the Holy Spirit will anoint God's special servant and enable Him to preach the good news of healing and deliverance in the acceptable year of the Lord. Jesus read this passage and then proclaimed, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Jesus got this special wisdom from the Holy Spirit. He was the Messiah, the Christ, the one anointed with the Holy Spirit beyond measure. That is where Jesus got the wisdom, and that is where He got the power to perform His mighty works. In His divinity, Jesus has divine wisdom and power, but in His human experience, Jesus received His wisdom and power from the Holy Spirit. Thus we read about Jesus' childhood in Nazareth:

Luke 2:52

52 And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.

The people of Nazareth had seen Jesus increase in wisdom as He matured into adulthood, and they acknowledged the wisdom in Jesus' sermon preached that day in their synagogue. Still they refused to believe in Jesus, and that brings us to our second point, contempt. The people took offense at Jesus and treated Him with contempt.

The people acknowledged the special signs, the signs of wisdom and power. Jesus gave evidence that He was the prophesied Prophet like unto Moses. God had warned against not heeding this special Messenger when He came. And yet the people still rejected Jesus. Why? They did so because of His humble origins.

On occasion, one will tell someone about something the Bible teaches, and the response will be, "I don't care if the Bible does teach that, I still don't accept it." That was the attitude of the people of Nazareth toward Jesus. They didn't care if Jesus did have the wisdom and the works, they still wouldn't accept Him. And why not? Because of His humble origins. They had known Jesus from His childhood. He was a carpenter and the son of a carpenter. His legal father Joseph was probably dead at that point, but Jesus' mother Mary was still living among them, and also Jesus' younger half-brothers and half-sisters. The people of Nazareth knew these people, these humble, uneducated, lower class people. These were Jesus' people, and they weren't going

to accept Jesus as whom Jesus claimed to be even if Jesus did have the wisdom and works which validated His claims.

Jesus then observed that the one place in which a true prophet tends not to be honored and accepted is in his own country and among his own relatives. As the saying goes, familiarity breeds contempt.

Jesus even includes His relatives in His statement. Earlier in Mark chapter three, we read that Jesus' relatives had concluded that Jesus was out of His mind and had lost His senses. They made an effort to lay hold of Jesus and to take Him away. The text in Mark chapter three says that Jesus' mother and brothers came seeking Jesus. That is when Jesus said that his true brother and sister and mother is the one who does the will of God. It is surprising to see Mary involved in this effort, especially when one considers all she had experienced from the time the angel Gabriel had visited her and told her of her coming miraculous pregnancy. Yet after Jesus' resurrection, Mary is among the faithful praying for the Holy Spirit in Acts chapter one, the half-brother James becomes a pillar in the church in Jerusalem and writes the book of James, and the half-brother Jude writes the book of Jude.

Just this past week, a man whom Mary and I met almost forty years ago called. He told me that some of the people in his church were not friendly with him, and yet a non-Christian involved in a very perverse lifestyle treated him kindly. This was bothering him, and he called to talk with me about it. I told him not to be surprised when he as a Christian has experiences

like those which Jesus had here on earth. Even those close to Jesus at times treated Him with contempt. We should not be surprised when that happens to us as well as His followers.

Our last point is the consequences. The prophecy about the Prophet like unto Moses warned that there would be dire consequences for those who did not accept this coming Prophet. Our passage for today says that there were consequences for those in Nazareth who did not accept Jesus, who responded to Jesus in unbelief, who treated Jesus with contempt. The consequence was that Jesus could not do any mighty works there at Nazareth.

Now some people take this too far and conclude that Jesus can't save us without our help. We do our part by believing, and Jesus does His part by saving. Jesus does the greater part, but our small part turns the point and makes the difference between heaven and hell. No, that is not correct. Jesus isn't helplessly dependent upon us in that way.

Jesus was not helplessly dependent on the people of Nazareth for doing mighty works. Jesus could not do mighty works there because He chose not to as His response to their unbelief. It is not uncommon to be in a situation where we can do something in terms of physical ability but we can't do it because it is contrary to our character. An example would be the alleged statement of the young George Washington about his father's cherry tree: "I cannot tell a lie."

Let me give an example from redemptive history. In Genesis 19, two angels come to rescue Lot and his family before they destroy the city of Sodom. Lot asks permission to escape to the city of Zoar. One of the angels responded to Lot,

Genesis 19:22

22 "Hurry, escape there. For I cannot do anything until you arrive there." ,,

This angel had the power to destroy Sodom before Lot escaped from the city, but he could not destroy the city before Lot escaped in the sense that He chose not to. He chose to delay the destruction until Lot was safe.

This same principle is found in Isaiah 59:1-2:

- 1 Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.
- 2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear.

Jesus could not do any mighty works in Nazareth. As Jesus would later say regarding another city, the city of Jerusalem:

Matthew 23:37

37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

This is an expression of the free offer of the gospel. Responding to the gospel in faith is the sinner's responsibility, and Jesus grieves when the sinner refuses to do so in unbelief.

Yet when we do respond to Jesus in faith, we shouldn't boast about what we have done in believing. We should thank God that He opened our hearts to Jesus by working faith in them. Salvation is a sovereign work of grace and a gift which we do nothing to deserve.

The free offer and sovereign grace are both true because the Bible teaches them both, and we should believe them both.

The lesson from this passage in Mark is the importance of our faith in Jesus. We should treasure our faith in Jesus because our faith is our connection with Jesus. We should pray for God to continue working faith in our hearts. Faith is a gift not in that God believes for us but in that God gives us a believing heart through the new birth. We should pray for a believing heart, and then do all that we can to nurture that faith, to feed that faith, to grow that faith. We do that not by focussing on our faith but by focusing on the object of our faith, and that is Jesus. Familiarity with Jesus should not breed contempt. The better we know Him, the more we trust Him. We get to know Him by worshipping Him on the Lord's Day with the people of God. We get to know Him by listening to Him speaking to us through the written word. We get to know Him by talking to Him through prayer. We get to know Him by obeying Him and living life as He would have us live it.