

## **A Prophet without Honour**

**Mark 6:1-13**

**Covenant Waterfall, 26 July 2020**

Read

Pray

### **Introduction**

“Receive Christ and all your problems will disappear!” If we’ve been walking with the Lord for some time, we all know that this is not true! Granted, there are many blessings we experience in Christ. Yet struggles and rejection are a part of the deal too. If you’re one of the few Christians in a family, you will experience this all the time – ridicule, jokes will be made at your expense, they just don’t understand why you believe the things you do. Sharing the gospel with them just seems a fruitless exercise, remain hard-hearted, think they’ll never come around. What’s the point?

Face a similar situation in a new church plant like ours. It’s challenging! People don’t just flock to church! Especially now in this pandemic. Face rejection from friends you invite, hard-heartedness and resistance from others. Some remain apathetic and battle with unbelief and fear. Like in our experience with our families, it’s easy to start to think, what’s the point? Should we give up?

Our passage from Mark 6 this afternoon, shows that that we should persevere! Why? Because even Jesus and his disciples experienced rejection and resistance to the gospel. It’s to be expected, it’s a part of the deal. Because Jesus experienced rejection and resistance, we should expect it too. But, as we will see here, we don’t need to lose heart – because God is sovereign, Jesus will nevertheless build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail. Two parts:

- Unbelief in Nazareth, vv. 1-6
- Commissioning of the Twelve, vv. 7-13

## **A. Unbelief in Nazareth, vv.1-6**

**He went away from there and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him. <sup>2</sup> And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue,**

Jesus returns to the town where he grew up – Nazareth. Remember over the past few weeks, we’ve seen that he has been ministering around the Sea of Galilee – in Capernaum and in Gentile territory across the lake. We’ve seen him do some incredible things and been received by many people. He has demonstrated his authority over creation by calming the storms and the sea. He has shown that he is Lord over the forces of darkness by driving out a host of demons in the Gadarenes, and last week we saw him raise a dead girl to life, showing his authority over even death. All these mighty works that he has done have revealed to us one important thing – that Jesus is indeed the Lord of heaven and earth – he is God himself!

Now Jesus is back home. It’s the Sabbath and he’s been invited to teach in the synagogue. That’s an honour – it shows that his home town has recognised that he is a man of significance. Not anyone can just stand up and teach in the synagogue.

Verses 2-3 tell us the reaction of the people in the synagogue as he starts to teach:

**and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? <sup>3</sup> Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offence at him.**

We see first that they are genuinely “astonished”. They recognise something unique and special in Jesus’ teaching. They recognise that he has wisdom. They also have heard about the many signs and wonders that he has done in the region, and are wondering how he was able to do all these things.

Yet that astonishment quickly turns into offence. They can’t deny that there is something special about Jesus. But they can’t get their heads around how this man whom they’ve all seen grow up in their midst as a boy, whose played with their kids in the streets, whose family they know, who they think is just a simple carpenter - this very ordinary man in their eyes – is proclaiming and doing incredible things. How is this possible? We see here they

also call him, “the son of Mary”. That’s an insult. He should have been called the son of Joseph. Calling him Mary’s son is alluding to gossip that everyone in Nazareth would have been familiar with, and that Jesus would have heard since a child, that he was illegitimate. Remember, Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit before she was married to Joseph.

All of this comes to a head as Jesus is preaching here in his home town. And it culminates in Nazareth taking great offence at Jesus, as we see in verse 3. The very people with whom he is most familiar, his own community, reject him and despise. Even though they have witnessed for themselves his sinless life growing up, and now heard him preaching the gospel, proclaiming that he is the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel, they harden their hearts towards him. The prophet Isaiah prophesied the rejection Jesus would face in chapter 53:3:

**“He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”**

Rejection from those who know us the most is also common to us. Those of us who faithfully witness to Christ among our own families and those people who have known us the longest, know how difficult it is. It’s like there is an unwillingness to accept such good, amazing and life-changing news from someone who they see as very ordinary.

Jesus summed this up in verse 4, as he responded to his countrymen in the synagogue in Nazareth:

**<sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour, except in his home town and among his relatives and in his own household.”**

Familiarity breeds contempt. We all tend towards this. It is a part of the wickedness within our hearts – we undervalue those with whom we are most familiar. Those whom we know the best and the longest, we soon overlook their exceptional qualities, as we become very familiar with their weaknesses and sins. We respect them less as we see them in more of an ordinary light because we’re with them all the time. What is unforgivable in Jesus’ case, is that he truly had no weaknesses and sins – and that’s a real indictment on them. Verses 5-6 continue...

**<sup>5</sup> And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. <sup>6</sup> And he marvelled because of their unbelief.**

What then was the result of their rejection and unbelief of Jesus? The text tells us here that Jesus **“could do no mighty work there”** except for a few healings. What is this telling us? Is this saying that Jesus’ power was thwarted by the peoples’ lack of faith in him? Did their unbelief sap Jesus’ power to do miracles?

There are popular teachings in the church today, most notably rooted in the Word of Faith movement (Kenneth Copeland, Joel Osteen, Benny Hinn, Joyce Meyer, Bill Johnson, Todd White) which teach that human faith gives power to God. Our faith enables God to do things. Conversely, it is our weak faith or lack of faith that prevents God from acting. Hence when you pray for God to heal you and you are not healed, it’s on you, it’s because of your lack of faith. Our faith is said to be so powerful that God is unable to act without it. Result? Makes us out to be very powerful, but makes God out to be very weak!

So does this verse give support to this kind of destructive teaching? No. It’s possible to translate this verse from the Greek in this way: “Jesus *would* do no mighty work there...” The point is here that Jesus chose not to do many miracles in Nazareth. He was not prevented people’s unbelief. He is the all-powerful, sovereign God, he can do what he wants. To say that people’s lack of faith prevented him from exercising his divine power would be to deny his divinity. Nothing is impossible with God!

So why did Jesus choose not to do many mighty works in Nazareth? It was his way of judging them. We’ve seen from the first four verses of this chapter, that they have already rejected him. The point of Jesus’ miracles is always to reveal his identity as God, as we’ve seen throughout this Gospel. So for Jesus to do more miracles among these people who have already rejected him, would have never convinced them, as their hearts were already hardened towards him.

We have to keep in mind the truth of God’s sovereignty here. He does what he wants. Our wills and our lack of faith can never stop him from achieving his will. Psalm 115:3 says, **“Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.”** In Isaiah 46:10 God declares that, **“My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.”** There are times where Jesus heals people with weak faith – Mark 9:24 (father of the demon-possessed son), with no faith

– John 11:23-24 (Martha – Lazarus), and with faith – two examples we saw last week in Mark 6 (Jairus and woman with bleeding).

Faith definitely pleases God, and without it we miss out on his blessings. Yet God will do what he wants regardless. He is not restrained by our lack of faith. Sometimes he chooses to heal those who have faith, sometimes he chooses to heal those with no faith. Point? God is sovereign! Trust in his goodness that he will always work all things for his good, even the bad things. Ultimately, we are to look forward to the hope of the new creation where we are promised in Revelation 21:4 that:

**“He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.”**

#### **B. Commissioning of the Twelve, vv. 7-13**

**And he went about among the villages teaching. <sup>7</sup> And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. <sup>8</sup> He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— <sup>9</sup> but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.**

The result of Jesus being rejected in his home town of Nazareth was that he left it behind and went to minister among other villages in the region, as the end of verse 6 tells us. It's during this time that he commissions his twelve disciples. He sends them out. The Greek word used for “send out” is where we get “apostle” from – “sent out ones”. Here they are to pack light as they go about their ministry, and be reliant on the Lord for provision.

Until this point, they've just been following him and learning from him. But now Jesus gives them authority to minister in his name – to partake in the same kingdom ministry that he has been doing: preaching the gospel and having authority over demons and healing the sick. Their commissioning as his apostles is a unique thing. They will have the privilege of being disciplined by Christ himself. They will be witnesses to his resurrection. They will lay the foundations of the church. And they will receive special revelation from the Holy Spirit to write the books of the New Testament. In Ephesians 2:20 it says that the church is built

upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. This shows us that the apostolic office was temporary. Jesus' apostles had a unique and specific task to do – to witness to his resurrection, get the church established and receive gospel truths by revelation for the church – the NT. Paul calls himself the last apostle in 1 Corinthians 15:8. No new apostles today – unique ministry!

Verse 10 continues:

**<sup>10</sup> And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. <sup>11</sup> And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” <sup>12</sup> So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. <sup>13</sup> And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.**

Jesus prepares the apostles for the resistance and rejection that they will face as they go about preaching the gospel. In verse 11, it's clear that they should expect to be rejected – expect people not to listen to them. It goes with the territory! So what is Jesus' advice to the apostles in the face of rejection? Give up? Throw in the towel? Curl up on a couch and cry? No! Quite the opposite – “shake the dust off your feet and move on!” There is no time for self-pity here, you cannot let rejection for the sake of Christ crush you. Instead, carry on preaching the gospel!

Verse 12 says that **“they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.”** This is key. The temptation for us is to preach a more sanitised, seeker-sensitive, non-offensive gospel, that will attract people and keep the numbers up – especially if we've experienced rejection. What we see here is that the apostles didn't compromise on the gospel. They preached the same gospel that Christ had taught them – that we have all sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God – we all deserve God's wrath and judgement. As a result, we all need a Saviour, Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah, the only one who can forgive us our sins and through whom we can have peace with God. Therefore, repent, turn from your sins, and receive Christ by faith!

While we see that the apostles undoubtedly experienced much opposition as they preached this gospel, verse 13 shows that God was with them in their ministry. He blessed their

preaching and by the Spirit's power, souls held captive by the powers of darkness were set free – dead sinners were raised to new life in Christ!

This is an encouragement for us, that God promises to bless the faithful preaching of his Word. There will always be fruit when the gospel is proclaimed – it may not be immediate, or look how we expect it to look, but God will always achieve his purposes through it.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the opposition, rejection, resistance, unbelief and hard-heartedness that we will all face if we're faithful in proclaiming Christ's gospel; the good news is that Jesus promises that he will build his church and the gates of hell shall not prevail. God's power can never be thwarted by anyone's unbelief or lack of faith. He will do it regardless! So church, take heart! Don't give up just because your friends and family make fun of you and reject you. You will always be a "prophet without honour" among those who know you well. Our Lord experienced the same, if not much worse. Continue to live for his glory, bearing witness to Christ's name and his gospel. One of the best ways to do this is to invite people to church – here they will be guaranteed to hear the gospel!

Yet if you're sitting here and still refuse to trust in Jesus, in his once for all sacrifice on the cross for sins, in his death and his resurrection – your lack of faith in Christ will deprive you of the many blessings of God – peace with him in Christ, forgiveness of your sins, his Spirit and the promise of eternal life. Ultimately unbelief leads to death – like Adam – disbelieved God's promises and instead trusted in the serpent.

It's only through faith that we can please God and have life in him. Repent and receive Christ by faith! There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Trust in his name, in the Name that is above all names, the King above all kings, the Rock of our salvation!

Amen