

The Sin that Stops the Power of God

Text: Mark 6:1-6

Introduction:

1. This section of Mark's Gospel records a visit of our Lord to His hometown of Nazareth. The majority response was one of unbelief, so much so that Christ could "do there no mighty work" (Vs. 5). Matthew's account puts it even more bluntly – "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." (Matt. 13:58)
2. The verses contain a powerful challenge to the lost and the saved of the evil of unbelief and the bitter fruit it produces.
3. Let's consider 3 lessons about unbelief we find in these verses.

I. The Revealing of their Unbelief (Vs. 1-3)

A. The Scene of their Unbelief (Vs. 1)

1. "into his own country" = This is clearly the village of Nazareth as Luke 4:16 notes that this is "where he had been brought up" At the time of Christ it was an insignificant village with a population of around 500 inhabitants. This was Christ's second and final recorded visit to Nazareth, his first occurring shortly after his temptation in the wilderness (Luke 4).
2. "his disciples follow him" = this was a mission outreach to hometown Nazareth.

B. The Scepticism of their Unbelief (Vs. 2)

1. The Evidence Received (Vs. 2a)
 - a. The evidence of Christ's **Words**
 - i. During Christ's previous visit He had made direct Messianic claims (See Luke 4:16-21).
 - ii. Christ spoke powerful words of truth that 'astonished' them. The word 'astonished' means "to strike out or expel by a blow". They were shocked and dumbfounded by His preaching; they found it mind-blowing. "*Never man spake like this man.*" (Jn. 7:46)
 - b. The evidence of Christ's **Works**
 - i. "mighty works" comes from the Greek word 'dunamis' which is a word used repeatedly of Divine, Supernatural power in the N.T.
 - ii. The works of Christ added further weight and authority to His claims – John 10:37-38 "*If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, **believe the works:** that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.*" John 14:11

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*“Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me **for the very works’ sake.**”*

2. The Evidence Rejected (Vs. 2b)
 - a. “Their agnosticism and scepticism found its expression in the form of a question. In order to maintain their disbelief, they looked for any explanation other than the obvious one.” (JM)
 - b. This is the character of unbelief. Unbelief is a wilful hardening of the heart in the face of indisputable evidence (truth). These people refused to submit to the obvious conclusion the evidence was leading them to that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.
 - c. Evidence of Christ’s Lordship will lead to salvation when the heart responds in faith. But when the heart is hardened and entrenched in unbelief, it will look for superficial arguments to try and avoid the demands of the truth.

C. The Scorn of their Unbelief (Vs. 3)

1. The first questions in Vs. 2 were aimed at His ministry. These next questions are aimed at him personally (Vs. 3) Since they could not refute the message, they attacked the Messenger.
2. “Is not this the carpenter” = Christ had evidently been taught the carpenters trade by his step father Joseph (Matt. 13:55) and was known as such in the village of Nazareth. Justin Martyr (in the middle of the second century) said that Jesus made “plows and yokes.”
3. “the son of Mary...the brother of...his sisters” = Christ’s family was very familiar to this audience and at this point, with the probably exception of Mary, still did not believe in Him themselves (John 7:5). We have clear evidence that they did later (Acts 1:4; Epistles of James and Jude).
4. “they were offended” = were made to stumble. This offense found its root in pride. Who did He think He was! To them He was just “the carpenter” from down the street!

II. The Reproof of their Unbelief (Vs. 4)

A. The Lord’s Claim (Vs. 4a)

1. Our Lord likens Himself to a prophet in this verse. He was often considered to be one of the prophets (See Vs. 15). He was the Prophet who was prophesied of by Moses in Deut. 18:15. Indeed He was much more than a prophet! He was Prophet, Priest and King; God manifest in the flesh.
2. A prophet was a messenger from God with a message from God.

B. The Lord’s Comparison (Vs. 4b)

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1. Christ had mentioned this same proverb during his previous visit. It is a maxim that contains a similar truth to the one expressed in our modern saying, “familiarity breeds contempt.”
2. Christ mentions “three decreasing circles of persons to whom the prophet is related.” (Hiebert)
3. Christ did not say that a prophet would be honoured everywhere but that he would not be “without honour” especially in places outside of his home area. In other words, the natural tendency of the sinful heart is to lightly esteem the words of truth when they are delivered to us by one with whom we are very familiar (parent, friend, pastor).
4. Question: Would you be more likely to take offense to being confronted by the truth from one you know well (e.g. parent, pastor, friend) or someone from another country or locality? It all depends on your ATTITUDE to that authority and the truth but the natural tendency of the sinful heart is to despise and disdain truth from the lips of those closest to us.
5. This is a dangerous trap and can have disastrous results. If a man is sent from God with a message from God, our place is to respect the messenger and receive the message.

III. The Results of their Unbelief (Vs. 5-6)

A. The Restriction of Christ’s Power (Vs. 5-6a)

1. The danger of unbelief to the lost – it leads to damnation
 - a. Unbelief is at its root, a heart problem, a rejection of the truth of the Gospel. So long as unbelief reigns in the heart, there can be no salvation as we are saved “*by grace **through faith***” (Eph. 2:8-9)
 - b. John 3:18-19 Jesus said, “*He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that **believeth not** is condemned already, because he hath **not believed** in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.*”
 - c. Mark 16:16 “*He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that **believed not** shall be damned.*”
 - d. Revelation 21:8 “*But the fearful, and **unbelieving**, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*”
2. The danger of unbelief to the saved – it leads to departure (backsliding & apostasy)
 - a. The writer to the Hebrews warns believers of the danger of unbelief – “*Take heed, brethren, lest there **be in any of you an***

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*evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be **hardened** through the deceitfulness of sin.”* (Hebrews 3:12-13)

- b. “It is of utmost importance that we firmly grasp the truth that this unbelief is not intellectual, but moral; it is not the doubt of the inquiring mind, but of the wandering heart.” (W. Jones)
- c. “he could there do no mighty work” = what staggering, shocking words. This same Jesus is the One who created the universe and holds it all together! This Jesus is the One who knows all the stars by name. This Jesus is the One who possesses all power (Psalm 62:11), the One who can do the impossible (Matt. 19:26). But in this case, He says I **cannot** work! Why? “because of their unbelief” (Matt. 13:58). How evil is unbelief! “It (their unbelief) closed the door against the operation of His power.” (Hiebert)
- d. “he marvelled because of their unbelief” = there are only two times where it is recorded in the Gospels that Christ ‘marvelled’. Both of them were in relation to faith. The first instance was in relation to the faith of a centurion who besought Christ to come and heal his sick servant (Matt. 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). Christ said of this centurion “I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel”. What a contrast to this second instance where Christ marvels at His hometown’s lack of faith.

B. The Retraction of Christ’s Presence (Vs. 6b)

- 1. Challenge for the lost – to reject the truth in unbelief is a dangerous thing and you are not guaranteed another opportunity.
- 2. Challenge to the saved – while you can’t lose your salvation, you can lose the joy of your salvation and God’s hand of blessing. The Spirit of God can be grieved and quenched in our lives.
- 3. Challenge to the church – Christ left Nazareth never to return. As a church, if our hearts become hardened into unbelief through the deceitfulness of sin, we run the very real danger of forfeiting the presence and blessing of Christ. There are churches today that used to know God’s power and presence that have the word “Ichabod” written across them – “the glory is departed” (1 Samuel 4:21). Christ’s rebuke to the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2:1-7 is a sobering reminder that if a church cools in its affections towards Christ, He may remove their candlestick (Vs. 5).

Conclusion: **To the lost** – will you submit to the truth of the Gospel and be saved? **To the believer** – will you repent of your backsliding which is bringing about a retraction of the presence and power of God in your personal life and your church?