



Speaker:
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The Necessity of Faith

Series: The Gospel of Mark • 17 of 17

8/30/2020 (SUN) | Bible: Mark 6:1-6

We're onto the sixth chapter of Mark's record of the life of Jesus. We're reading the first six verses today.

We left Jesus and the disciples last week at Capernaum. We witnessed two miracles: the healing of a disease in one and a raising from the dead in the other. Today we're observing how Jesus and his followers go to what's called "his own country". It simply means his own area, and we know Jesus was from Nazareth.

You may have heard the term *gospel harmony*. This describes the attempt to construct an accurate, chronological account of Jesus's life. The Gospels of Matthew Mark and Luke are used for this purpose. They're different perspectives but similar enough to compare. Now in preaching from Mark, it's not my intention to bring the different eyewitness accounts together to give the fullest picture. If Mark decides to omit certain incidents or details, I'll generally not preach about them. Each of the gospels deserve attention in their own right. But still, I think the attempts to harmonise these different accounts into one has its place. It's through these endeavours that we've discovered we can't assume each of these gospel accounts are chronological. I wanted to mention it because I found something of interest for us today.

I learnt that this return to his hometown wasn't his first visit during his ministry. I'm not going to preach on that first visit, but we should at least bear this in mind. He faced great hostility then, and his reception this time isn't much better.

I intend to open up this passage for you today with the use of five aspects—five headings. I'd like us then to firstly consider how:

THE PEOPLE ACKNOWLEDGED JESUS CHRIST AS UNIQUE.

The first thing we notice is their astonishment. Astonishment. You might recall chapter 1, when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue. They were "astonished at his doctrine". And they were even more astonished when he cast out a demon.

Back in chapter 6 we read of the questions coming from the astonished hearers. *Where's he getting this knowledge from? How's he come to have such wisdom?* We read in John 7:14-15, "Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught. And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?" By "letters" it means "learning". How can he be educated without an education!

The people's astonishment is also due to the mighty works Jesus had performed. I'm sure Jesus was the talk of the town—in which case the people will have heard of the incredible miracles he'd performed. There was such power in this man! *Viruses* obeyed him. *Demons* obeyed him. *The elements* obeyed him. **And even dead people obeyed him.**

They acknowledged him as unique, then. But secondly, let's see how:

THEY PERCEIVED HIM AS PERFECTLY NORMAL.

Jesus's family and the people of his hometown had observed him growing up as a normal child. They knew he required food, water and shelter just like them. They saw him working for a living, the same as everyone else. They got this one thing right: he **was** a real man.

Their minds can't shed this question: *Isn't this the local carpenter? He just makes things out of wood. He may do it to a high standard. But he's still just a regular carpenter.* It's interesting to compare the thoughts of those who witnessed some of the actions of the apostles. In Acts 4:13 it says, "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus."

The people of Nazareth *knew* Jesus! They knew his trade. They knew his parents. They knew his family members. *We know him*, they said, *and he's just like us!* It's a great testimony to the doctrine of Jesus's humanity. These people were **fully convinced** he was just like them. He didn't wear bright white clothing. He didn't have a halo on his head. And I imagine he wouldn't have got a job as a male model! Isaiah 53:2-3 says, "For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Jesus could have spent his time in this world as a tall, physically attractive man. He could have worn shining white clothes. He could even have produced a halo effect over his head. **But God was not going to draw people to Jesus through such carnal attractiveness; he was going to draw people to Jesus with a God-given faith.** And unless God *does* draw a man to Jesus by an irresistible work of the Holy Spirit, they will **never** come to him.

Having looked firstly at the admission that Jesus was special, and secondly at the perception of him as being normal, we'll now look at:

THE CONCLUSION THEY CAME TO.

It's because of the very nature of the incarnation that this paradox arises in the minds of people. On the one hand, it was clear Jesus spoke with real authority and displayed a power superior to that of any mere man. On the other hand, all the evidence of their senses showed them Jesus was, most certainly, a man. A voice of authority coming an uneducated tradesman. A divine power coming from one in all appearances no different from them.

There's the puzzle. If Jesus had a physical appearance that matched his miracles, no doubt all would believe he was a prophet of God. Likewise, had his actions been normal, matching

his appearance, all would happily conclude he was just a normal man. But here they're faced with something else. A mixture they can't fathom. God-like actions from this guy down the street!

God says they're responsible for their unbelief, their sceptical attitude. **But there's not one of us that would've reacted any differently unless God gave us heavenly vision.** I've used this picture before to try and drive home just how puzzling this must have been for these people. Picture a lad of thirty years old. He's a roofer perhaps. And he lives in your street. You see him one day pack his bags and leave. And stories start to circulate about him. Strange articles appear in the local papers where witnesses are claiming to have seen this man do miraculous things. It's all over the internet. Then one day he comes back to Liverpool. He's different. His speech is odd. He talks like he understands the mysteries of God. He comes across as one who has been *with* God. And he might even bless you by performing a miracle in your presence. What would you do with that? You can see how these people felt.

If you think a miracle would be the real deal-clincher, you'd be wrong. Some of the people who witnessed Jesus's miracles first-hand went on to reject him. What would you do with this man down your street? Most likely, you'd convince yourself the reports of his miracles were fake. And if you saw him perform a miracle, you'd likely persuade yourself it was some kind of conjuring trick. Man, left to his own devices, will gravitate very naturally towards unbelief.

So what was *their* conclusion? **They took offence.** They were offended. This is the cry of the world today. More and more people are becoming offended. *They're told they should feel* offended, and if they don't feel it at first, they convince themselves they ought to be! If you say something another finds offensive, you'll likely be reported to someone. Jobs have been created to clamp down on offensive speech. Laws have been made to see to it that certain people are shielded from feeling offended. And I'll take the opportunity at this point to say unreservedly that the whole anti-offence industry is **sinful**. A Christian might object to this and claim the motives for these policies are good. But that's not true. Because if a Christian goes to the media, their employer, or the police, and complains they're offended by the promotion of sexual immorality, for example, their protests will be ignored. If anything, they may even find themselves being arrested for simply expressing their opinion. I find the best way to cope with the world's hysteria is to ignore it and keep your eyes on Jesus.

These people were offended at Jesus. But offence can mean different things. Not everything Jesus spoke caused outrage. The sense of "offence" here is that the people formed a mental barrier against accepting Jesus as a prophet of God or something greater. There was a stumbling block in their minds. For all they heard and saw, they couldn't shake the reality that they knew Jesus to be a normal human being. Isaiah 49:7 reads, "Thus saith the LORD, the Redeemer of Israel, and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, to a servant of rulers, Kings shall see and arise, princes also shall worship, because of the LORD that is faithful, and the Holy One of Israel, and he shall choose thee." It was prophesied that Jesus would be despised, and he was.

The people knew Jesus was unique...but he looked *normal*. They inevitably came to a conclusion. Did they conclude he was Lord of all? No. They concluded he was a fraud. So fourthly, we listen to Jesus explain:

WHY THEY CAME TO THIS WRONG CONCLUSION.

A prophet, he says, might be respected elsewhere, but not in the area he comes from. To be more specific, it's the people who know him. So that applies to the streets where he grew up but also the family he lives with—even if they move to a different area. It's those who know you from old. The ones who remember you from back in the day.

I've explained that, with those who knew Jesus in his earlier life, their refusal to accept him was based only on them being convinced he was no different from them. But remember: these people were not recalling Jesus's past sins, because they were none!

- As a child, he was obedient to his parents
- As a learner, he was attentive and well behaved
- As a tradesman, he was honest
- And as a neighbour, he was nothing but friendly.

How much more, do you think, will modern day prophets be rejected? The modern counterpart of a prophet would be primarily the preacher. But the principle can be extended to all believers who are bearing witness for Jesus Christ. People are offended at us too. The reasons are slightly different. We don't bear the same power as Jesus did in his ministry. But we bear a message. The other difference is that we've sinned all our lives. So instead of fully considering a message, people cannot shake the knowledge of your sinful past and your humanity.

Jesus mentions three different audiences who find it most difficult to accept representatives of God: those of their own country, that is the area they from; their relatives; and those of their own household, that is their parents, siblings, etc.

- **You should expect to find a difficult audience in your former neighbours.** You may have been seen when a young person damaging someone's property. People might remember you stealing your mum's cigarettes. They may have witnessed you getting drunk as a teenager. And if you were saved later on in life, you may have left people with memories of your selfishness, dishonesty, pride, aggressiveness, adultery, or your poor show as a husband and father. We're all different. We have different paths. But THERE'S NOT ONE OF US that hasn't left a trail of sin in our lives. No doubt the people in the areas where I grew up would gladly share stories of some of the bad things I did.
- **But you should also expect to find a difficult audience amongst your relatives.** If the people in your street knew you, how much more your relatives! They'd be party to all kinds of details other people wouldn't. Spending time in your home, or on holiday with you, they'd see all kinds of actions and attitudes they could remind you of if need be. How sad it is to witness to a relative only for them to say, *You have a very short memory! Don't forget: I knew you when you were younger!* What they're

saying is they won't listen to anything about morality or sin from someone with a history similar to theirs.

- **And the worst audience of all can sometimes be those of your own household.** Your parents. Your siblings. Even your own *children*. Only God in heaven knows more than these people about your behaviour. If need be, they could rake up thousands of examples of your bad behaviour. They see your inconsistency, and they're VERY good at remembering it. And so Jesus shows us the tragedy that **those we love most are often least likely to listen to our testimony.**

I note it said Jesus was astounded by people's unbelief. Dare I say it he was *surprised* by it. I said to you that, in considering the life of Jesus as we are, we shall time and time again come face-to-face with the mystery that is the incarnation. I had cause to mention it only last week. It comes into play now because, if he was surprised, it suggests he wasn't expecting it, which in turn suggests he didn't know everything. And there are several other examples in the scriptures which suggest the very same thing. I told you last week I didn't understand the incarnation. A week has passed, and I still don't! The safest course to take in these baffling theological puzzles is to stick to what the scriptures say.

He marvelled at their unbelief.

I want to use these points to introduce my final and most important point. It is that:

FAITH IS A GIFT OF GOD.

Verse five of our chapter says something rather surprising. It says Jesus *could not* do any significant works in the town because of the people's unbelief. Now that statement raises a flag in our minds. Jesus was unable to do something? In view of what we said a moment ago, about Jesus being taken aback, you might think this statement means Jesus was *unable* to perform miracles in this case. You might argue that, by virtue of him humbling himself to the state of a man, he relinquished some of his power—that he didn't have that absolute power that could overcome unbelief and heal anyway.

The more likely explanation is that Jesus *could not do these things while being consistent*. He meant to show very clearly the necessity of faith for healing, most especially **healing from sin**. In his hometown, there were so few who'd received God-given faith in him that he *wouldn't* perform great miracles without it.

This was Jesus's hometown. No doubt he had some kind of affinity with the place and the people. How good it would have been for him to go home and help the people and bless them with miracles. But instead, **he would withhold these things in order to present to all people the importance of faith**. That verse we all know from Ephesians tells it very clearly. "By grace are ye saved, through faith." The grounds for our salvation is the grace of God. The means which he employs to save us is faith.

So a man needs faith in order to be saved. But how does God communicate this faith to a man? After all, a man cannot exercise faith in Christ by himself. People are so steeped in pride that their very nature puts them off. Admitting their utter worthlessness is not an

option. UNLESS GOD HAS DECREED BEFORETIME TO GIVE FAITH TO A MAN, THAT MAN WILL NEVER HAVE FAITH IN JESUS. Salvation is ALL of God.

- The purpose in eternity was of him
- The regeneration of his people is of him
- And the very attitude of repentance and faith that a broken man experiences is still all of God.

The question stands: how *does* a man come to have this faith? Paul gives us the answer in the letter to the church at Rome. Faith comes by **hearing**. Hearing what? Hearing God speak. God speaks to us today through his word. And whether that word is read to us or read by us, we hear it. In the story arc of a man's salvation, God sees to it that man hears his word, and through it is given the gift of faith and repentance.

But what if God has determined to judge a people?

- **He will create a dearth of gospel preachers.** Very few, if any, will have that fire kindled in their souls, the fire that drives them to preach the word of God to saints and sinners alike.
- **This dearth of preachers leads to a famine of the word of God.** The evangelists vanish from the city centres. The pulpits are filled by those who don't understand the gospel. Christian bookshops contain New Age ramblings and popery.
- **This famine means the people don't hear God speaking.** The only voices they hear are from the lying media and shallow showbiz personalities, false religionists and fortune tellers.
- **And the absence of hearing God through his word means there's no faith.** And a society that doesn't have faith in God will reject his ministers, laugh at the gospel, undermine marriage, distort justice, and generally do that which is right in their own eyes.

Jesus turns from his own hometown to the villages. He took his divine words and works elsewhere. On a bigger scale, he would later tell the Jews that the kingdom would be taken from them and given to someone else. And on the largest scale of all, we read that the gospel which is at present being preached all over the world will soon be removed. Sinful men and women the world over will sooner or later realise the terrible judgement unbelief has brought on them. Time is running out for this world. The era of the gospel preacher will soon be at an end.

If there are gospel preachers in our land, and they are, we should be thankful to God. It is he who takes men who are unfit for the task and equips them. The gospel can be heard in the town centres. Scores of congregations around the land are blessed to hear faithful ministry each week from their pastors. And of course we can hear the Bible by reading it ourselves, and there's no shortage of Bibles in our land.

God tells us he has people out there—his children, yet to have their destiny revealed to them. And we're all to try to reach them as best we can. For most, this will be in quite small ways. But there's something else you can do. God tells you to pray specifically for the raising

up of gospel preachers. Pray that the mighty name of Jesus might be uplifted in our land. 1 Peter 2:4 says, "To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious..."

He is a precious saviour. And although he was destined to be rejected by all but a few, we have to present him to men, women and children. We tell them about Jesus. We tell them what he has done for us. We tell them he WILL save all who come to him in faith. **Blessed**, Jesus says, is the one who is not offended by him.

Amen.