

MARK 6:1-29 Kingdom Going and Rejection

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For centuries people believed that Aristotle was right when he said that the heavier an object, the faster it would fall to earth. Aristotle was regarded as the greatest thinker of all time, and surely he would not be wrong.

Anyone, of course, could have taken two objects, one heavy and one light, and dropped them from a great height to see whether or not the heavier object landed first. But no one did until nearly 2,000 years after Aristotle's death.

In 1589 Galileo summoned learned professors to the base of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. Then he went to the top and pushed off a ten- pound and a one-pound weight. Both landed at the same instant.

The power of belief was so strong, however, that the professors denied their eyesight. They continued to say Aristotle was right. And this is indeed what continues to happen in the book of Mark, throughout time, and even to those around us. People see the truth of the Christ, but deny their eyesight.

Let's take a minute and quickly review where we have been in Mark and where we are this morning.

We have read through many stories so far. And while each story stands alone, together they form a much more complete picture of Jesus not only as the Messiah, but as the Son of Man, with authority over all.

This morning we finish the first section in Mark.

- We began with an introduction of the purpose of the book, to talk about the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We immediately saw that his coming was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
- We saw Jesus preaching the gospel in the first chapter, and then calling some of his disciples.
- In the second and third chapter Jesus began his teaching and healing ministry.
- He called the twelve and we see that these ordinary men will be responsible for the preaching of the Gospel.
- In chapters four and five Jesus continues teaching, healing, and casting out demons.
- And at the end of chapter five we see again, the general attitude of all the people when, in response to raising Jairus daughter the people were astonished.

Remember, however, that this amazement does not necessarily equate to faith.

In some cases many of these people probably are like the parable of the soil and are at the point of weedy or rocky ground. And now Jesus goes back home to Nazareth and there are no large crowds there. And this time it is Jesus who is astonished.

Mark 6:1-6

The Bible doesn't say that Jesus was astonished, or amazed except for two times...here and what we read in Matthew regarding the faith of the centurion. With the centurion Jesus was amazed at his faith. Here he is amazed at the unbelief in his own hometown.

We think about faith as powerful, don't we? We saw in the last chapter the faith of the demons, the faith of the woman, and the faith of the centurion.

But today we see that unbelief is powerful as well. Unbelief is a great force.

- We see this with Eve who demonstrated unbelief, in the Word of God, and brought the entire human race down into a curse and eternal judgment.
- We see this with the people in Noah's day whose unbelief brought judgement from God in a flood.
- We see it in the people of God who refused to enter the Promised Land.

The New Testament has a lot to say about believing. It has a lot to say about faith. But it has much to say about unbelief as well.

In the familiar words of John 3:16, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life, for God did not send His Son into the world to judge the world but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged, but he who does not believe is judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

John MacArthur writes, "This speaks to the tragedy of human responsibility, doesn't it? It speaks to the fact that the sinner has the duty to respond to the gospel and is guilty and culpable for his own unbelief."

John 5:39 reads, "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and these are they that testify about Me and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life."

The sinner that is unbelieving and unwilling to come, bears the responsibility for that unwillingness and that unbelief."

And as far as the Bible records, Jesus will never return to his hometown again.

The people's initial reaction was amazement. They were amazed at two things: his "wisdom" and his "mighty works." They knew he was not a schooled rabbi, and yet he spoke with a clarity and authority beyond any they had ever heard. They were truly amazed.

But as they began to talk among themselves, a common response began to play out.

- "Isn't this the carpenter, the town handyman?"
- This man is a blue collar worker.
- He's not so great.
- He's just like us.
- Isn't this the illegitimate son of Mary?
- Jesus was victim of: familiarity breeds contempt.

And this is what amazed our Lord. How terrifying it should be to amaze God with one's unbelief!

Why is this so terrifying? “And he could do no mighty work there” (v. 5). Unbelief hinders God’s power.

Let me explain what I mean before you all tune out at that comment. Jesus could not do miracles because he would not. Omnipotence is not omnipotence if it is bound by anything but its own will. Jesus was morally compelled not to show his power.

But what about the faith displayed in these accounts?

- We see little faith displayed when Jesus calms the storm.
- We see great faith when Jesus casts out the demons, heals the woman, and raises the dead girl.
- We see no faith at the beginning of chapter 6

Faith is not the main lesson of these texts.

- God certainly uses our faith to teach us about ourselves
- God certainly expects us to have and to exercise our faith
- God may rebuke us for our lack of faith

But what faith DOES NOT do is to manipulate or control God and his working. Our ever increasing faith is not like some super incentive that gives “Super-God” more power. And, conversely, our lack of faith does not act as Kryptonite – limiting the power and ability of God. No – the point of the texts is not about our faith, but about the power and authority of Jesus Christ – whether we have any faith or not.

Now we will begin to see a huge shift in Jesus ministry. Jesus is beginning a new strategy, if you will. Up until now Jesus has been the lone preacher (with the exception of John the Baptist) but now he is sending the twelve. This is their first short-term mission. It is not far and not long. Jesus gives them both the message to preach and he gives them the power to do miraculous wonders that validate the message. They were given sermons that Jesus had preached and they were able to do the signs that Jesus had done.

Verse 7 records the sending: “And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.”

Verses 8– 11 spell out their instructions for ministering to an unbelieving world. READ IT

It was rabbinic law that when a man entered the temple courts, he must put off his staff, shoes, and money belt. That is, all ordinary things were to be set aside. Maybe Jesus was thinking of this, wanting his men to see that the humble homes they would enter were every bit as sacred as the temple courts.

And once they found a home willing to house them, they were to stay – even if it was a place where they had to sleep on the floor and eat porridge each day. This wasn’t a vacation, but a taste of the reality that comes with following and proclaiming the gospel. And finally, “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” (v. 11).

So what was this testimony? Possibly some action intended to leave a lasting impression on the people. It would probably express scorn toward the unbelievers. I'm sure the main reason for all these conditions was so they would be dependent upon Christ for strength. The minimum of provisions and comfort was meant to call out maximum faith. And the result is explained to us in verse 12. The Twelve experienced great power in bringing the gospel to an unbelieving world. It was repentance, deliverance, and healing, just as if Christ were physically there. There was a small picture of what the Church would do through the centuries when it operated in the power of the Holy Spirit.

And now John relates what may appear on the surface to be a completely unrelated story – but it isn't. John the Baptist, the forerunner to the Messiah and the last Old Testament prophet and the man of whom Jesus said, "among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11: 11). The greatest man...the greatest prophet of all before Christ. John was a miracle child. He was born to the aged priest Zechariah and his wife, Elizabeth, long after the time it was possible for them to have children. Their son was also a Nazirite from birth, due to the orders of the angel, Gabriel. As such, his hair was never cut, and he never touched a dead body or drank fermented drink (Numbers 6). John was alive to God. As he grew in his knowledge of the Scriptures and God's call upon his life, he took up the garb of an ancient prophet, wearing a rough coat of camel's hair and a leather belt and subsisting in the wilderness on a diet of grasshoppers and wild honey (Matthew 3: 4).

This is the story of his execution.

It is a preview of the murder of Jesus Christ. And though the Jews didn't actually kill John the Baptist with their own hands, Herod did. And though the Jews didn't actually kill Jesus with their own hands, the Romans did. Still, the Jews stood by while the murders occurred.

Mark 6:14-29

What did Herod hear? The Gospel, possibly as preached by the twelve in addition to Jesus. Miracles were happening everywhere they went, dead people coming back to life, people with diseases healed, demons being cast out and the gospel being preached. There's never been anything like this explosion of miracles and the explosion of gospel preaching. But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John whom I've beheaded has arisen". Herod knows John, he knows him well. He kept him in prison for over a year. He knew him face-to-face. He knows that John was a righteous and godly man. He also knows that he had him executed in a bizarre, drunken, wicked party to satisfy his own pride and the vengeance of his own wife. And so he imagines his worst fear. This must be John back from the dead.

Why did Herod arrest him in the first place and then behead him?
And, who is this Herodias? And why the big deal?

Herodias was the daughter of Herod's half-brother Aristobulus and was thus Herod's niece. Further, when he met her in Rome she was the wife of another of his half-brothers, Herod Philip, and therefore his sister-in-law. But he nevertheless seduced her and persuaded her to leave Philip to become his wife. So we see now why John the Baptist would say, "It isn't lawful to have your brother's wife." And of course this makes Herodias really angry and so it's become a settled grudge against him. She wanted to put him to death, but she couldn't.

She wants him dead.

She's tired of hearing about the sin. She wants him silenced. She wants to put him to death. She can't do it.

Why? "Because Herod is protecting John, for Herod was afraid of John - knowing that he was a righteous and holy man. When Herod listened to John the Baptist he was very perplexed. He couldn't understand the message. He couldn't figure out what he was saying about the Messiah, about judgment. But he used to enjoy listening to him.

And the same Herod that murdered John the Baptist allowed for the execution of Jesus. If you reject Jesus Christ, you stand with his executioners. There's no escaping it. You either embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior, or you reject him. And if you reject him, you put him to shame by that rejection.

But Jesus welcomes your repentance, and welcomes you into his Kingdom if you turn from your sin of rejecting him, confess your sin, acknowledge him as Lord and Savior and receive his forgiveness.

You go from death to life, from darkness to light, from blindness to sight, from hell to heaven, from tragedy to ecstasy, this is the gospel.

And that is the point of application here for those in Jesus hometown that rejected him, and for those who rejected the message from the twelve, and for those like Herod who hear, listened and yet refused to believe. Any it may be many of you who haven't yet believed and surrendered their lives to Christ.

For those here this morning who claim the name of Christ:

As we ponder the work of John the Baptist.

As we think about the work of the Twelve.

What a privilege it is that we are called to this same ministry. The ministry of the Gospel. I heard this phrase last week in another context, but it applies to us at the Chapel this morning, "The message isn't new, it's just our turn to proclaim it."

What a high calling. What a privilege. We are not noble, or great, or all highly educated. We are the nobodies that God has chosen. God is still using the same type of people he used then. Jesus strength is perfected in our weakness. "The message isn't new, it's just our turn to proclaim it."