

Sermon outline and notes:

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## Mark 6:1-6a “Tying the Hands of God”

Intro. The title of my message should grab your attention. You see, the Bible declares that God is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). The apostle Paul said that God “desires all men to be saved” (1 Tim. 2:4). Yet there is a way to keep God from doing the saving work that He wants to do. God wants to snatch your soul from the brink of hell, but there is a way to tie His hands, so to speak. I’m sure Jesus wanted to do mighty miracles in Nazareth to lead His home town to turn to Him as Savior. But v.5 says, “Now He could do no mighty work there....” What is it that can hinder the saving work of God? I am going to answer that question in my message today.

At this point in His ministry, Jesus is still tremendously popular with most people. Now in our story today, He returns to Nazareth, His home town. Even though Jesus was born in Bethlehem and spent much of His public ministry based in Capernaum (Matt. 4:13), He was and remained “Jesus of Nazareth” (Mark 1:24; 10:47; 14:67; 16:6; etc.). Nazareth is where a year before He had been rejected by the people and evicted from the synagogue (Luke 4:16-30).<sup>1</sup> It was certainly an act of grace on His part to give the people another opportunity to hear His Word, believe, and be saved. He returned because He wanted to reach His hometown people. Perhaps the news of the recent mighty miracles He had performed would have reached their ears by now.

When He arrived in Nazareth, He was given the opportunity to teach in the synagogue. In this story we are going to see 3 responses to Jesus by the people of His hometown. All of you here today have heard of Jesus, & most of you are very familiar with Jesus. What is your response to Jesus so far? Have you put your faith in Him as Savior? He stands at the crossroad of your life. What you do with Jesus, & how you respond to Him will determine your eternal destiny. Your response will mean the difference between life and death. So I want you to compare your response to Jesus with the responses of the people of Nazareth. By the time I conclude the message, I hope you will have the right response to Jesus.

So what kind of responses do people have to Jesus? First of all:

### I. MANY ACKNOWLEDGE HIS GREATNESS

It was the custom of our Lord to go to the synagogue on the Sabbath day wherever He was. I hope you follow Jesus in this regard, & attend worship services each week. When He attended the synagogue services, He was often invited to be a guest teacher. Such an invitation to speak would indicate that He had become well-known as a teacher.

Now notice the reaction of the people. In the last of v.2 we read, “And many hearing Him were astonished, saying....” As He was teaching, the normal silence of the audience was interrupted by people beginning to speak to one another throughout the congregation. The first reaction on the part of the audience may be viewed as favorable. His old acquaintances were struck with astonishment (*ekplesso*) that was more than just a momentary feeling (imperfect tense). Or we

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<sup>1</sup> However, Hendriksen & some others believe that Luke’s account is the same event. In both accounts they marveled at His teaching (Lk. 4:22). In both accounts Jesus quoted the proverb about a prophet being without honor in his home town (Lk. 4:24). Yet there are a number of differences. For example, in Mark Jesus is called Mary’s son, but in Luke He is called Joseph’s son.

may say they were completely flabbergasted. They acknowledge that He manifested astonishing greatness in different ways. Notice that they acknowledged that:

A. Jesus Was a Great Teacher – In the last of v.2 we read, “And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him....” Jesus had become a marvelous teacher of God’s Word. He had great insight into the Word of God. He was not dry like the Rabbis, but held people’s interest. He told interesting stories to illustrate truth. He spoke with authority. He was truly the greatest teacher that had ever spoken in Nazareth.

Furthermore, in addition to His great teaching, they also acknowledged that:

B. Jesus Manifested Great Power in Working Miracles – They commented in the last of v.2, “that such mighty works are performed by His hands!” The people of Nazareth could not very well deny the facts. The distance between Nazareth and Capernaum was only about twenty miles. Had they not heard of His recent mighty miracles performed in or around Capernaum? He calmed the raging storm. He tamed the demoniac, whom no man was able to tame. He healed the woman, whom no doctor had been able to help the last 12 years. And He even raised from the dead a 12-year-old girl. The messengers who announced her death did not think that was possible.

God is great, & we should expect that His Son would be a great teacher, & a great miracle worker. I believe the greatness of Jesus is one of the evidences that Jesus *is* the Son of God. His ministry only lasted about 3 years, and yet He had more impact upon this world than any other person.

On the other hand, there are many people who are like the people in Nazareth. They are willing to acknowledge that He was a great teacher & preacher. Many will even acknowledge that He evidently worked miracles. How else can you explain the impact that Jesus had? However, merely believing certain facts about the greatness of Jesus is not saving faith. That was certainly true of the people of Nazareth. So notice the second reaction to Jesus that we see here. In spite of the acknowledged greatness of Jesus, we see next of all that:

## II. MANY ARE OFFENDED AT HIM

Their favorable reaction did not last. Enthusiasm began to be replaced by adverse criticism. The last of v.3 says, “they were offended at Him.” Literally they stumbled (*skandalizo*) over the apparent inconsistency between His humble upbringing, & what they were now seeing & hearing. Surely, the words were wonderful, but coming from Jesus? How was that possible? What was the source of such wise & capable teaching? They could not explain Him, so they rejected Him. That the source of both the words and the works might be God did not seem to occur to them. Besides, if in Capernaum He did all this, then why does he not do something similar here in Nazareth, for His own home town? Let Him start His performance! (See Lk. 4:23). Yet as we read in v.5, “He could do no mighty work there.”

People are still offended at Jesus. You see, the kind of Jesus that they want, & perhaps the kind of Jesus that they have heard about is different from the Jesus that is presented in the Bible by a faithful Gospel preacher. Quite a few these days present Jesus as a Santa Clause who wants you to prosper in material things. But the true Jesus calls upon people to deny self, take up their cross, & follow Him. The true Jesus calls upon people to repent of their sins, and warns of eternal hell. And so when people hear about a different kind of Jesus, some are offended & don’t come back to church. They stumble over the difference.

Now I want to explore the reasons for their reaction. For thirty years He walked with God under the eyes of its inhabitants, living a blameless and quiet life. But they never imagined that Jesus was the Messiah. So here they were offended at His sudden rise to greatness for the following reasons:

A. Because of His Humble Background – I believe Jesus deliberately lived a quite, humble life until He began His ministry. There were several aspects of His humble background. For example:

1. He Had a Humble Occupation – In v.3 Jesus is called “the carpenter.”<sup>2</sup> Joseph was a carpenter (Mt. 13:55), and no doubt Jesus learned the trade from him. Mark is the only Gospel writer that reports that Jesus was a carpenter. Writing sometime between A.D. 155 and 161, Justin Martyr, speaking about Jesus says, “He was in the habit of working as a carpenter when among men, making plows and yokes.” He probably made furniture as well. I would imagine that He did very fine work. What the detractors wanted to say was on this order: “What does a mere carpenter know about oratory or the Law, or about prophetic interpretation and fulfillment?”

There is a lesson here for us. For almost twenty years of His adult life, our Lord was not ashamed to work with His own hands. He who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them took the very nature of a servant, & worked as a carpenter. By the sweat of His brow ate His food as a working man. He bore upon Himself the curse God placed upon man after man’s fall into sin, & worked by the sweat of His brow. Both in life and in death He humbled Himself. If Jesus worked with His hands, then we should be willing to do the same! By the way, some pictures you see of Jesus make Him look thin & weak. I believe He was strong in body after years of working in the carpenter’s shop. That prepared Him for those strenuous years of His ministry.

Furthermore, they were also offended by:

2. His Ordinary Family – People tend to judge you by your family. In v.3 they said, “Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” The people were also scandalized by Jesus’ lowly origin. They found it difficult to believe He was any better than they. After all, He was from a common, lowly family. They name His family members. Joseph is not even mentioned, probably because by this time he had died. First, they call Him “the Son of Mary.” It is most unusual to refer to a Jewish man as the son of his mother, even if she was a widow. The reference to Jesus as the son of Mary may have been a deliberate slur by the townspeople. In addition to Mary, the brothers of Jesus are also mentioned.<sup>3</sup> As to the sisters, they are never mentioned by name. Presumably they were married and still living with their husbands in Nazareth.<sup>4</sup> They must have wondered why His brothers and sisters did not possess this same power and wisdom. What made matters worse was that most in Jesus’ family joined with their neighbors in rejecting His claims (cf. 3:20-21, 31-35). The very fact that the people of Nazareth were so well acquainted with Jesus’ family, having known them for so long a time, caused them to look down upon Him. Who did He think He was anyway? The more important people had known the humbleness of His home, and could not adjust themselves to look up to Him, instead of down.

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<sup>2</sup> The word for “carpenter,” used in the original is *tehton*, related to the English word “technician.” Actually, a *tehton* is basically any skilled workman, anyone who “brings forth,” “makes” or “creates” an object. One might say, any “craftsman” or “builder.”

<sup>3</sup> There was first of all James, a man who after his conversion was to become prominent in the early church, especially in Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13-29; 21:18; I Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:19; 2:9; 12: James 1:1; Jude 1). About Joses, mentioned next (called Joseph in Matt. 13:55), nothing further is known. Then there was Jude (cf. Jude 1); last of all Simon, as unknown to us as is Joses.

<sup>4</sup> Here is clear evidence that Mary did not remain a virgin.

Furthermore, another aspect of His humble background was:

3. His Lack of Formal Education – That was the basis for their question about the source of Jesus’ wisdom. He had not studied with a rabbi and therefore did not have proper credentials. Surely an ordinary, unschooled individual, such as they “knew” Jesus to be, had no business revealing “this kind of” wisdom! Likewise, John 7:15 reports another occasion when the Jews marveled, saying, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” They could not explain Him, so they rejected Him.

Pride was also playing a role here, at least for some. Men resent it as a kind of slight on themselves that the other, who was one of them but yesterday, should be so far above them today.

We more clearly understand their offense at Him when we consider the claim of Christ. Luke 4 records a visit of Jesus to the synagogue at Nazareth where he reads from Isa. 61:1-2a. At this point, Jesus said, “Today, in your very hearing, this passage of Scripture has been fulfilled.” Since that was a well-known messianic prophecy, He was in essence claiming to be the Messiah! Could such an ordinary person be the Messiah? They stumbled over Him because He was so different from their own picture of what the Messiah would be like.

I want you to understand that what God did for Jesus, He can do for you in similar fashion. You may come from a humble family background, have a limited education, & just be a common working man or woman, but God can save you, fill you with His Holy Spirit, & enable you to do great things for Him. D.L. Moody was an uneducated layman, but God used Him to lead hundreds of thousands of souls to Christ. And when one of us is so transformed, let us learn from these words, and take care that we are not blind to some true messenger of God just because we have been blessed with close companionship with him.

In addition His humble background, they were also offended:

B. Because He Became a Prophet – Jesus identified part of the problem in v.4 when He said, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.” It is significant here that Jesus makes a definite claim to being a prophet. He was no longer a carpenter, but a prophet, a preacher of the Word of God. And even though a prophet is generally honored, he is not honored in his hometown. What was happening in Nazareth was a common reaction that other prophets had experienced.

Sometimes many of us are more effective away from home than we are at home. I guess that is one reason why I have never gone back to my home town of Rome, GA to pastor a church. Also, when friends and family do not accept our invitation to believe in Christ, we are in good company with Jesus.

Now when people become offended at Jesus, that leads to another problem:

### III. MANY REFUSE TO BELIEVE IN HIM

This is stated in v.6, where we read, “He marveled because of their unbelief.” Unbelief is the oldest sin in the world. It began in the Garden of Eden, when Eve listened to the devil’s promises instead of believing God’s words, “you will die.” Unbelief makes people refuse the plainest evidence, shut their eyes against the clearest testimony, and yet believe lies. Worst of all, it is the most common sin in the world.

Notice a couple of truths about unbelief that we see here.

A. Unbelief Is Amazing in Light of the Evidence – Again, in v.6 we read that Jesus “marveled because of their unbelief.” Mark described the very human reaction of Jesus. As Deity, He would not marvel at anything. Yet in His humanity, He expected a different reception at

Nazareth than He received. The verb “translated “marveled” (*thaumazo*) occurs thirty times in the four Gospels. However, twice the word is used with reference to Jesus (Matt. 8:10 & Luke 7:9- same event; Mark 6:6). In the one instance He is amazed or astonished at the remarkable faith of a centurion of Gentile origin. In that man’s case faith could hardly have been expected, for he was far less privileged than were the Jews. Here in Nazareth, on the contrary, Jesus is amazed about the people’s lack of faith. Here faith should have been expected, for Nazareth was a town in Galilee, the very Galilee which had become so highly privileged because of the ministry of Jesus. They had seen His pure character while He grew up among them. They heard with their own ears His wonderful teaching. They saw, or certainly heard about His great miracles. Yet, they still did not believe! Unbelief is so suicidal and unreasonable a sin that even Jesus regarded it with surprise, or at least with disappointment.

Many times, I too marvel at unbelief. I preach a wonderful Savior. To me the evidence that He is the Son of God & Savior of the world is overwhelming. Yet over the years I’ve seen people hear a Gospel sermon, only to walk away without truly believing in Christ. I marvel, and yet I am also grieved.

Here we see that the main reason people do not become Christians is not due to lack of evidence. The people in Nazareth had plenty of evidence regarding Jesus. They even acknowledged His greatness. They did not believe for other reasons. He simply did not fit into their preconceived ideas. Others do not believe in Jesus because they simply don’t want to believe, for they don’t want to turn from their sin.

B. Unbelief Restricts the Work of God –There is a peculiar expression in this passage which deserves notice. I refer to the words in v.5 which say that our Lord “could do no mighty work there,” because of their unbelief. This expression of course cannot mean that it was “impossible” for our Lord to do a miracle there. With Jesus nothing is impossible. If He had willed to do miracles, He had the power. The meaning evidently must be that our Lord would not do any miracle there, because of the unbelief that He saw. He “could not” do any miracles there without departing from His rule, “according to your faith will it be done to you” (Matthew 9:29). Instead of asserting His almighty power to suppress the people’s rebellious stand, He respected their own responsibility for their attitudes and actions.

This passage of Scripture clearly reveals man’s responsibility for his attitudes and actions. God and His Son could do anything, but they have chosen to limit themselves in accordance to human response. The atmosphere of chill unbelief froze the stream of the waters of life. Christ “cannot” save a man who does not trust Him. Faith opens the door, and unbelief shuts it in His face. This reminds me of what Jesus said in Matthew 23:37, “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!” Their unbelief & unwillingness kept Christ from saving them as He so wanted to do.

Now here’s the lesson: One of the primary limitations to omnipotence is unbelief. Faith is the one requirement to release the power of God in salvation. In the great chapter of Isaiah 53 that reveals God’s great salvation, the prophet opens the chapter with: “Who has believed our report and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (Isa. 53:1). My friend, unbelief shuts off Omnipotence. I would like to see God work more powerfully in our church. What is hindering Him? Could it be the sin of unbelief? Are we not praying, & trusting in God as we should? Do we just not believe that God can send great revival?

Now in contrast to the unbelief of most in Nazareth, we read a hint of a glimmer of faith. In the last of v.5 we read, “except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.” Even though the unbelief of Nazareth was so strong that most did not bring their sick to Jesus, at least

some did. And at least some of them had true faith, so Jesus did not refuse them. He healed at least a few people.

This situation in Nazareth would remind one of that which at a later time existed in the church of Sardis. That was a dead church. Yet Jesus said in Rev. 3:4, “You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments.” Thus, the “remnant” doctrine runs as a golden thread through Scripture.

However, whatever the situation may have been with respect to these few, the Nazareth audience as a whole turned its back upon Jesus. By and large the sick remained unhealed, their sinners unpardoned. Unbelief has the power to rob people of the highest blessings.

So let us watch our own hearts carefully in the matter of unbelief. It is neither the lack of evidence nor the difficulties of Christian doctrine that make people unbelievers. It is lack of will to believe. Sin, including pride, keeps people in unbelief. So Hebrews 3:12 says, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” Unbelief is the sin that kept Israel out of the Promised Land. Likewise, unbelief will keep a soul out of heaven. Don’t allow unbelief to keep you from being saved.

Conclusion: Jesus Christ was a great teacher. Where did He get such wisdom? He was a great miracle worker. Where did He get such power? I believe the best explanation is that He is the Son of God. Only God could do what He did. We have even more evidence than the people of Nazareth. He also rose from the dead after they crucified Him. He was seen by over 500 witnesses. The prophecies bear witness that Jesus is the Son of God & the Savior God sent.

Now what will be your response? Will you be offended at Him? Will you reject Him because He doesn’t fit into your expectations of a Savior? Will you refuse to believe in Him? Or will you be one of the few who believes? Believe in Christ today! Turn away from the sin of unbelief, and God will be able to do wonderful things for our soul.

Sources: James A. Brooks, *New American Commentary: Mark* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987); Kenneth S. Wuest’s *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Mark (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1950). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

For further study, read sources on Matt. 13:54-58; Luke 4:16-24.

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