

Mark 6:1-13
Jesus' Response to Rejection
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Rejection is a painful experience, especially when those who reject you are close to you, dear to you. You have probably all experienced this in some form or another. What is the proper response to rejection? Sometimes we are tempted to react to rejection with denial. We refuse to acknowledge the reality of the rejection, and we continue to pursue acceptance where none is to be found. At other times we are tempted to respond to rejection with despondency. We turn inward and lose all hope and engage in self-pity. These are not proper responses when we are living righteous lives and are nevertheless rejected. We see how to deal with rejection from the example of our Lord.

Jesus went to His home town of Nazareth and preached in the synagogue there on the Jewish Sabbath. The people there in His home town rejected Him. The people as a whole refused to put faith in Him or to believe His message. The account found in the Gospel according to Luke tells us in more detail about the depth and hostility of their rejection:

Luke 4:28-30

- 28 So all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath,
29 and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff.
30 Then passing through the midst of them, He went His way.

After His sermon, the people even tried to kill Jesus, and Jesus was somehow miraculously delivered. He was somehow able to pass safely through this hostile crowd and to go on His way. His time for death had not yet then come.

After this rejection, what did Jesus do? We read that He found another avenue for ministry. He did not limit himself to continued efforts for acceptance at Nazareth. He accepted for the time the reality of their rejection of Him and His message. He also did not give up His ministry and calling and descend into self-pity. Jesus found another avenue for service. He began going to the villages in the vicinity of Nazareth and teaching the people there. He went in a circuit from village to village with His message. As we know from elsewhere, His message was that the kingdom of God was near, even present among them, because He was the king of that kingdom. The kingdom was then near in the person of the king. And their responsibility at such a time was to repent. The word "repent" is a broad term that can include the act of faith. The word in the Greek literally means to change one's mind, and people needed to change their minds about Jesus. They needed to recognize Him for who He was and to trust Him for deliverance from their sins. Repentance can also refer to a necessary and immediate fruit of faith. Our Shorter Catechism defines that aspect of repentance in its definition:

Repentance unto life is a saving grace, whereby a sinner, out of a true sense of his sin, and apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ, doth, with grief and hatred of his

sin, turn from it unto God, with full purpose of, and endeavor after, new obedience.

Sometimes repentance is used more narrowly and refers only to this fruit of faith that is here defined in our Shorter Catechism, and sometimes repentance is used more broadly and refers to the faith as well as its fruit. Jesus' message was, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." I believe that Jesus is there referring to repentance in the broad sense that includes faith as well as the necessary fruit of faith.

I believe Jesus had a second purpose in this teaching tour. It is always good to kill two birds with one stone when that is possible, and I believe that is what Jesus was doing. We read that Jesus' disciples followed Him on this trip to Nazareth. When Jesus went on this teaching tour of some villages around Nazareth, He was also giving His disciples another demonstration of how this is done. Jesus goes on a teaching tour right before He sends His twelve disciples out two by two on their own preaching tours.

Some of these twelve disciples had been with Jesus from near the beginning of His public ministry. Later in His ministry just before He preached the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had called twelve of His disciples to be His inner circle, to be the leaders of the new covenant Israel which Jesus was establishing.

Mark 3:13-15

13 And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.

- 14 Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him
and that He might send them out to preach,
15 and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out
demons: ...

Now notice that in Mark chapter three, Jesus chose twelve that He might send them out to preach, but Jesus does not send them out to preach until Mark chapter six. Also in Mark chapter three, Jesus chose twelve to have power to heal sickness and to cast out demons, but Jesus does not give them that power until Mark chapter six. There is a reason for the delay. Mark chapter three first says that Jesus chose twelve that they might be with Him. The time from their appointment in Mark chapter three until their sending out on their first preaching tour in Mark chapter six is their training time, their apprenticeship. And Jesus is training them by spending time with them, by being with them, and thus demonstrating to them the art of ministry.

In our Christian ministry to others, we are doubly effective when we can do as Christ did in His ministry. We are doubly effective when we are not only doing the work of ministry to which God has called us but when we are also doing that ministry with someone who is learning how to minister. The members of a church are doing well when they are faithfully performing the ministries to which God has called and for which God has gifted them. They are doing even better when they are also training a younger generation to take over those ministries in the future. They are doing even better when they are preparing to turn over the baton of leadership in the relay race of life that goes on from generation to generation. That is the example that Jesus set for us.

Jesus gave His own demonstration teaching tour, and then He began sending His disciples out in pairs on their own preaching tours. Let us see what we can learn from the instruction which Jesus gave them as He sent them out.

First we note that Jesus sent them out in pairs. The disciples could cover twice as much ground if they went out as twelve individuals, but Jesus sent them out in pairs. We later see the same practice in the missionary journeys in the book of Acts. Paul goes with Barnabas on his first missionary journey. On his second missionary journey, Paul goes with Silas, and Barnabas goes on his own missionary journey with John Mark. This is a good practice for several reasons. To begin with, the law of Moses requires at least two witnesses for a reliable testimony. There is an added credibility when two together testify to the truth of the gospel and to the impact which the gospel has had on each of their lives. Also, two witnesses to the truth can complement each other with their differing gifts and abilities. They can learn from each other. They can encourage each other in hard times and hold each other accountable when they encounter temptations to sin. When one stumbles, the other is there to hold him up. When one strays, the other is there to bring him back to the straight and narrow. There are many advantages to ministering in pairs.

Next we see that Jesus gave them miraculous powers to heal and to cast out demons. God is always in the business of doing miracles, but God gives people miraculous powers only at certain times in history. We can always pray for God to do a

miracle, but that is different from asking God to give us the power to perform miracles. Redemptive history is what we call the period of history covered by the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, and there are only three periods in redemptive history in which God gave individuals the power to perform miracles. These are the times of Moses and Joshua, the times of the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and the times of Jesus and His apostles. God did miracles at other times, but I can't think of any time other than these three periods when God gave people the power to perform miracles. What these three periods all had in common was that God was giving new revelation at the time and God was using the power to perform miracles to authenticate the messengers.

When John the Baptist was in prison, he began to wonder if Jesus really was the Messiah. Apparently John the Baptist expected Jesus' victory over evil to come more quickly, and he apparently wasn't expecting to be thrown into prison. John the Baptist sent two messengers to Jesus with the question: "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" Here was Jesus response:

Matthew 11:4-5

- 4 ... "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see:
5 "The blind see and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached to them. ..."

This is what the prophets had prophesied about the Messiah. Jesus' miracles were authenticating signs and wonders that He

was indeed the prophesied One. These signs and wonders continued in the book of Acts to authenticate Christ's apostles and their message.

Notice also what the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:12:

12 Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.

The signs and wonders which Paul did were signs of His apostleship. We don't do signs and wonders today because we are not apostles or prophets. The church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. God doesn't give us the special powers needed for laying the foundation. The foundation has already been laid once and for all through the work of Jesus and His apostles. God gives us the gifts and abilities needed for building up the church on that foundation that has already been laid.

We read in our text that the twelve performed authenticating miracles by casting out many demons and by anointing many people with oil and healing them. I want to comment a little about their anointing the sick with oil. The same language is used in the book of James when James talks about the elders of the church anointing the sick with oil and praying for their healing. Many think that this anointing with oil is a religious ceremony, but I don't think that is what is meant. There are two Greek words for anoint. The one usually used in a ceremonial sense is the Greek word related to the word "Christ." The Christ

is the Anointed One. The other Greek word for anointing often refers to external applications of oil in common life. One of these applications of oil in common life was the use of oil as an external medicine. For example, the Good Samaritan in Christ's parable poured oil and wine upon the wounds of the stranger who had been waylaid by robbers. The Greek word for anointing used here in Mark six is the one for anointing in common life and not the one for anointing in a religious ceremony. The twelve were applying oil to the sick as medicine and then healing the sick with divine power. The oil certainly symbolized the healing power of the Holy Spirit, and perhaps God also used the oil as medicine in the healing process. God can heal both directly apart from medicine and indirectly through medicine. Medical missionaries today provide medicine to the sick and pray for God to use the medicine to heal them.

Let me also point out that Jesus gave these authenticating gifts to all twelve of the twelve disciples, and that included Judas Iscariot, who was a devil from the beginning. These powers authenticated even Judas as a messenger but not as a true saint. Remember that in this sense, the graces are more important than the gifts. Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them," not "By their gifts you will know them." Jesus said that on judgment day, many will say that they cast out demons in Jesus' name, but Jesus will say to them, "I never knew you, you who practice lawlessness." A person can have the power to perform miracles in the name of Jesus even when he leads a lawless life and is not a true saint.

Love is the chief of the graces and the first of the fruit of the Spirit. The Apostle Paul said,

1 Corinthians 13:2

2 And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

The graces are more important than the gifts. Remember this when you are looking for a new preacher or when you are seeking out a man to become a new deacon or elder. Don't be dazzled by his gifts and abilities if he is lacking in the graces.

Jesus also gave the twelve instructions on the provisions for their preaching tour. They were to bring only their basic necessities and were not even to bring any bread or any money to buy bread. They were to depend ultimately upon God for their provisions but more immediately upon the hospitality of those to whom they preached. These are instructions for a certain context, a basically friendly context. Jesus was sending out the twelve to the people of Israel during the height of the popularity of His ministry. In the book of Acts, Paul goes on preaching tours in more hostile territory, in areas where paganism prevailed. Sometimes Paul had to support his ministry by working at a tent maker, and at other times churches sent him the help which he needed to minister in a hostile environment. On this first preaching tour, the twelve were to rely on the hospitality of the saints.

They were to rely on this hospitality but they were not to take undo advantage of it. If one household offered them hospitality in a village, they were to stay there during their ministry in that village and not spend their time and energy looking for better accommodations. Even if something better was offered, they were to stay with their original hosts lest it look like they valued creature comforts over people.

Jesus also gave the twelve instructions on what to do if some village rejected them on their preaching tour, even as the city of Nazareth had rejected Jesus. Jesus said to shake the dust of that village off their feet in testimony against them. This is the kindest response because it testifies to the seriousness of their rejecting the message of Jesus. When Jews came home from travels in pagan lands, they shook the dust of their travels off their clothes and sandals lest any of that dust had been defiled with pagan defilements. Jesus is telling the twelve to use this same symbolic message for any village in Israel that rejected the message of Jesus. By rejecting God's true Messiah, they were manifesting that they were Jews only outwardly. Inwardly they were strangers from the covenants of promise and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Paul used this symbolism when some of the Jews from the synagogue in Psidian Antioch opposed his ministry:

Acts 13:50-51

- 50 But the Jews stirred up the devout and prominent women and the chief men of the city, raised up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them from their region.
- 51 But they shook off the dust from their feet against them, and came to Iconium.

Jesus said that the judgment of those who persist in such opposition to the gospel will be greater than the judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah because with greater light comes greater responsibility.

Finally we read that the pairs went and preached that people should repent. The Greek word here translated "preach" literally refers to heralding. The herald goes before the king and announces the king's message and tells people to prepare for the coming of the king. The twelve were proclaiming the same message that Jesus was proclaiming: the kingdom is near, so repent and prepare for its coming.

In closing, when someone rejects our Christian witness and ministry, Jesus shows us what to do. We are to look for other opportunities to minister in Jesus' name. We leave the closed doors as long as they remained closed and look for open doors. And as we take advantage of these opportunities, we try to involve others in our ministry. This way our time and energy serve a double purpose. We are ministering to people in the name of Christ and we are training people to minister in the name of Christ. This is how Jesus made good use of His time, and we should try to follow His example.