

“The Problem with Knowing Our Leaders”

Mark 6:3-4

(Preached at Trinity, October 20, 2010)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. **Verses 1-2** - At some point Jesus left Capernaum which was the place of His headquarters and returned to Nazareth which Mark refers to as His “hometown.” On the Sabbath it was customary for the Jews to go to their nearest synagogue. On this particular Sabbath Jesus entered the synagogue and began to teach. Every time Jesus taught people were amazed by His word. Great multitudes were coming to hear Him speak.
2. Once again the people were amazed at Christ:
"Where did this man *get* these things, and what is *this* wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"
 - A. Only this time their amazement was different. Their amazement was based upon their familiarity with Him. This was our Lord's hometown. They knew Him. They knew of His former profession as a carpenter. Many had purchased His handiwork. They knew His parents; His brothers and sisters. Perhaps some played with Him as a child.
Mark 6:3 – "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"
 - B. They knew Him and the text tells us that because of this they took offense of Him. How could this hometown boy speak to them with such authority? How could they bow before this one they knew so well?
 - C. The expression “familiarity breeds contempt” is the warning here.
3. Last time we examined this passage as it relates to an unholy familiarity with God. As the Divine Christ it was demanded that they bow before Jesus in holy reverence. But they couldn't see beyond the hometown image they had of Him. There is always a great danger in failing to recognize the great majesty and glory of our Creator. We can develop this unholy familiarity with God. We come to worship and go through the motions of worship but there is no holy reverence.
 - A. On one hand we have intimacy with God. We have access before Him as a child has access before his own father.
A king's own child may talk familiarly to his own parent with words familiarity. As the children of God we have the blessing of close communing between God and his own adopted child.
 - B. But on the other hand, He is God – high, exalted, and holy. He is infinitely greater than any of His creation. Every thought of Him should fill our minds with awe. We must guard against developing any familiarity with God that diminishes awe and holy reverence.
Spurgeon - There is a holy familiarity with God which cannot be too much enjoyed; but there is a flippant familiarity with God which cannot be too much abhorred.

4. At first the people received the words of Christ well. After all, no one could deny their power. No one could deny the authority by which He spoke.
Luke records:
Luke 4:22 – “And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, "Is this not Joseph's son?"
 5. But then their knowledge of Him caused them to disregard His teaching and His authority. In their familiarity with Christ they hardened their hearts and continued in unbelief.
 6. Tonight I want to address the topic in the context of leaders in general.
Jesus mentions the prophets. These were earthly leaders sent by God. Israel found it easy to dismiss their authority.
Matthew 23:34 – “I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city,”
Stephen: **Acts 7:52** - "Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute?"
 7. This continues to be a problem.
- I. The nature of authority
- A. Authority defined
 1. The most basic definition of authority is “the power one has to demand obedience.” It is the right to command.
 2. The issue of authority is at the very heart of the human condition. Are we allowed to conduct our life according to our good pleasure or is there a higher law that directs us. Most today see an inalienable right to self-determination. This attitude can be seen at the end of the Book of Judges.
Judges 21:25 – “In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which* was right in his own eyes.”
 3. The truth is all human beings need direction. God did not create us to maintain a strict self determination
 - B. God is the ultimate authority to which all must submit, but God has delegated authority upon the earth to which we must also obey
NASB **Exodus 22:28** – “You shall not curse God, nor curse a ruler of your people.”
Romans 13:1 – “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.”
 1. God has not purposed anarchy or absolute self-rule
 2. God has placed all men under authority – we must obey our leaders
This is the essence of the Fifth Commandment – we are born under authority.
 3. We are to obey earthly authority because God commands it – to reject earthly authority is to reject God.
 - C. We owe honor to the leaders God has placed in authority over us
 1. This speaks to children regarding their parents
 2. This speaks to wives who must be in submission to their own husbands
 3. This speaks to our duty to the civil authorities
 4. This speaks to the duty of employees to their employers
 5. This speaks to the duty of church members to their pastors

- D. The proper application of authority – we must guard against extremes
1. The Corinthians were giving too much honor to man – They were robbing God of His glory
 2. On the other hand we must always guard against disrespect
 3. Titles are a good thing. They are a reminder of position, of authority. Titles also guard against an over familiarity
 - a. Children often become over-familiar with adults – call them by their first names – The South is right – Mr. & Mrs.
 - b. College teachers should be referred to as “professor”
 - c. Our civil leaders should be referred to properly
Mr. Mayor, Mr. President, Senator. . . , etc
 - d. Military leaders should be addressed using their appropriate rank
 - e. In the church pastors should be addressed with their title
- II. There is a danger of looking upon our leaders with an unholy familiarity
- A. This has always been a danger – Moses continually faced this problem
1. Aaron and Miriam
Numbers 12:1-2 – “Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); ² and they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?"
 - a. Part of the problem was they knew Moses. Miriam held him as a baby.
 - b. They knew all of his weakness and frailties. Why should we follow him? After all, aren't we prophets also?
 - c. The very next thing we read in the text is:
Numbers 12:2 – “And the LORD heard it.”
 - d. God acted swiftly:
Numbers 12:4 – “Suddenly the LORD said to Moses and Aaron and to Miriam, "You three come out to the tent of meeting." So the three of them came out.”
 - e. God sent forth His judgment upon Miriam and she was smitten with leprosy. Aaron realized their great sin and cries out for mercy:
Numbers 12:11 – “Then Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord, I beg you, do not account *this* sin to us, in which we have acted foolishly and in which we have sinned.”
 2. At another time certain Levite by the name of Korah (Numbers 16:1) stood up against Moses
 - a. He gathered together 250 of the most influential and powerful men of Israel and they stood against Moses and Aaron
Numbers 16:2 – “And they rose up before Moses, together with some of the sons of Israel, two hundred and fifty leaders of the congregation, chosen in the assembly, men of renown.”

- b. Their charge was that Moses and Aaron were no greater than the rest of Israel
Numbers 16:3 - "You have gone far enough, for all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is in their midst; so why do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?"
 - c. God tells Moses to step aside; to get out of the way!
Numbers 16:23-24 – "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²⁴ "Speak to the congregation, saying, 'Get back from around the dwellings of Korah, Dathan and Abiram."
Numbers 16:32-33 – "and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, and their households, and all the men who belonged to Korah with *their* possessions. ³³ So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly."
3. Jesus is speaking here of the problem many of the prophets faced when speaking a word from God to those who were familiar with them
- B. There remains the danger of an unholy familiarity
- 1. The more we know of our leaders the more inclined we are to dismiss their authority
 - 2. Parents must guard against simply being the friends of their children lest their children hold them in contempt when they try to discipline them
 - 3. Wives will see many weaknesses and flaws in their husbands but this must not be used as an excuse to dismiss their leadership
 - 4. Church members can become friends with their pastors. They will learn of their human weaknesses and even their sin. But this never diminishes your duty to follow their leadership
- III. What is the solution to the danger of a familiarity that leads to disrespect?
- A. Many have taken the approach of maintaining separation
- 1. Many kings and leaders have made themselves absolutely unapproachable
 - a. We can see this in the book of Esther. No one was allowed to approach the king unless they were summoned – upon death
 - b. Some ancient leaders acquired the status of deity
The Roman Caesar was worshipped
 - c. Pharaoh was seen as a God to the Egyptians
Few were actually allowed into his presence. His decrees were usually passed along through a mediator which further gave the air of deity.
 - 2. There is some wisdom in leaders maintaining a degree of separation. The maxim – "Familiarity breeds contempt" has some truth in it
 - a. Parents have to maintain a degree of separation with their children
 - b. I learned early on as an employer that a certain separation was essential.
 - c. The Puritan, William Gurnall, said that good leaders should keep a distance from their followers lest an unhealthy familiarity develop.

- B. What about pastors
1. Some have taken the approach that pastors also have to maintain a distance from their congregation
Some elders keep a total distance from the congregation.
 2. There must be some degree of separation – a degree of dignity.
 - a. One of the qualifications for pastor is that he be respectable
The KJV translates it “of good behavior” but the word refers to dignity or respectability.
1 Timothy 3:2 – “An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,”
 - b. It is difficult for a congregation to take their pastor seriously from the pulpit when he doesn’t maintain a manor of dignity with them at other times.
 3. On the other hand, he *is* their shepherd. A shepherd can’t afford to be separated from his flock.
- C. The solution is two-fold
1. The first duty is to those in authority.
 - A. Pastors must remember the dignity of his office. And he must lead by example. The best way to gain respect is not by separation but by example. You have to be around people for them to follow your example.
This was Paul’s method
2 Thessalonians 3:7-9 – “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; ⁹ not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.”
 - B. Parents need to remember that God hasn’t called them to simply be friends to their children.
 2. The second duty is for us to follow our leaders
 - a. In Hebrews Paul give the charge to the congregation to follow their pastors
To those who led you in the past:
Hebrews 13:7 – “Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”
 - b. To those who are leading you today:
Hebrews 13:17 – “Obey your leaders and submit *to them*, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 – “But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³ and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.”

- c. They may risk an over familiarity by being near you. Your duty is to follow them as your leaders.
- 3. Fathers and mothers are near their children. They play with their children. Children have a duty to honor and respect their parents.
- 4. Often its only when our leaders are gone that we recognize the blessing they were in our lives. Many a child has lamented that they didn't truly appreciate their parents
Alexander McLaren – “Some of us entertain 'angels unawares,' and have bitterly to feel, when too late, that our eyes were holden that we should not know them.”

Conclusion:

All of us are people under authority. And most people rise to some position of authority. May God grant us the wisdom to know how to behave both as leaders and followers.