

Mark 6: 1-6; "And He Marveled at their Unbelief"; Sermon # 31 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 15th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.

Coming into chapter 6 of Mark we find that there is a great contrast between the last chapter and this. In the last chapter there were many indications of faith at work in the hearts of people who Jesus touched, and who touched Him. But in this chapter we find that Jesus is confronted with unbelief at every turn. In Chapter 5 Jesus encouraged the new found faith of the man who had been possessed with a demon, leading him to go back home and speak of the great things that the Lord had done for him. He heard the words of the woman with the issue of blood confessing that she had thought to herself, "If only I could touch the hem of His garment, I will be healed and she was. He heard the words of Jairus the leader of the synagogue whose little daughter lay dying, saying to Jesus, "Come and lay your hands on her, that she may be healed and she will live." And not only did Jesus come to his house to heal her; He ended up doing the greater miracle yet, when He raised her from the dead. It is when faith is at work in our hearts that great things can happen to us, and great things can be done. Such mighty workings, which the Lord Jesus did, with so much power and grace flowing forth from Him, drew crowds of people to Him to be healed and, certainly they came also to listen to Him preach. He preached the shortest of sermons to Jairus. He said, "Do not be afraid, only believe." And yet how much is in those words. Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen. With faith, all things are possible. But now we find our Lord Jesus in a different city. He has come to "His own country" with his disciples. "His own country" was Nazareth, the city in which Joseph and Mary settled after Jesus was born. He was born in Bethlehem according to the prophecy of Micah; He was raised in Nazareth, that city which Nathaniel referred to in John chapter 1, verse 45. It says there, "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote--Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'" "And Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'" Philip said, "Come and see." Nazareth was not a spiritual stronghold; it was hard ground, spiritually speaking. If you traveled around and you were able to take the spiritual pulse and temperature of the various cities in that day you would find that there were some cities more receptive to the Lord Jesus and spiritual things than others. In some towns and cities, the crowds were almost near to breaking the door down where Jesus would stay, in order that they could find help and healing and to listen to His words. But where pride and prejudice ruled in the heart; there Christ found no welcome.

What is the most amazing thing in this passage, however, is the statement in verse 6 where it says, "And He marveled because of their unbelief." You would think that being the Son of God, that because of His deity that He would never "marvel" over anything since He knows all things and all the fullness of wisdom and knowledge are found in Him. But it is because He was and is a Man, and He has the feelings and thoughts of human nature in His being, just as you and I do; that He marveled over

their unbelief. Jesus is only said to have marveled over men's faith in two places in the Scripture. The one positive instance of His marveling was found in regard to the Centurion of Matthew 8: 5. He was the man who came to Jesus seeking the healing of his servant who was dreadfully tormented in his paralyzed state. Jesus had said that he would come and heal him, but the centurion said, "I am not worthy that You should come under my roof." "But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed." "For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me and I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this and he does it." When Jesus heard it, it says, "He marveled, and said to those who were following him, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!" Jesus marveled at the greatness of this man's faith because He believed that Jesus could heal his servant by His word alone. This is what He still does through the preaching of His word, even today, in the salvation of people's souls. Do you believe it?

The other instance of Jesus marveling is this one; His marveling over the unbelief of people of His own home town. And we must ask ourselves the question this morning, "What is it that Jesus was marveling over in regard to the unbelief of these people?" What is it that we ourselves should be warned about in regard to the sin of unbelief so that we might not fall into it, or if we have fallen into it, that we might not stay in that awful state. I believe that Jesus was marveling over 3 three characteristics of unbelief which are manifested by the people of Nazareth. 1st - Unbelief is blind to the idea of Christ being the wisdom of God. (Verses 1 and 2) 2nd - Unbelief greatly resists the idea of Christ's lowliness and poverty. (Verses 3 and 4) 3rd - Unbelief seldom understands how it limits Christ's blessings. (Verses 5 and 6) Let's think upon these characteristics, and think about whether of not we are believing or unbelieving this morning in relation to the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1st of all - Unbelief is blind to the idea of Christ being the wisdom of God.

Why do I say this in relation to this text? It is because of the questions that these people in Jesus' own home town asked. "Where did this Man get these things?" "And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands?" You would think that since they are Jews and Jesus is teaching them in the synagogue, that as they heard Him speak, and were astonished by His teaching, that they would begin to reason with themselves and ask themselves good questions. How could this person be anything less than a prophet sent from God if He speaks this way? Perhaps since He speaks so powerfully and with such great wisdom, that there is a good chance that He is the Christ! He could be the promised Messiah, indeed! Instead of connecting the wisdom which He spoke with, to the possibility that He was the Son of God; the questions that they ask are of a very doubting nature. "Where did this Man get these things?" He wasn't educated by any of our rabbis. He didn't go to any of the schools of the Pharisees or the Sadducees. So, somehow or other, He must have gotten this wisdom and this ability from some other source. Perhaps the Devil? Perhaps it is Satan that is giving Him that wisdom and power. They did not know. Perhaps He was in league with him. Perhaps He has just holed Himself up

somewhere, and read all of the books without having the supervision of the authorities in our synagogue or in Jerusalem. He had to get these things from somewhere; but that somewhere, they think, cannot be God. He has to have gone around the proper way to attain to this kind of knowledge and power.

You see, this is nothing other than raw unbelief. These people did not believe that God could communicate any gift or ability to a person apart from the human means of education. They did not believe that God would ever use other methods of raising a man up to greatness and usefulness except through the schools of higher learning, and particularly the schools of their denomination or church. These people simply could not account for the wisdom and power of Christ. Or maybe the better way to put it, is that they do not want to account for it in the true and right way. Jesus really was sent from God. Jesus really was woven by God the Holy Spirit in Mary's womb and the divine and the human nature were placed together in the same person. Jesus really was the personification of wisdom. God really had endowed Him with the Spirit of wisdom and Understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. (Isaiah 11: 2) This is why we read of such statements in the New Testament such as the one in Colossians chapter 2, verse 3 - "In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." And verse 9 of that same chapter says, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead in bodily form."

You see the problem with unbelief is this. The person who is unbelieving does not want to admit the possibility that Jesus is the One whom they should believe because He proves Himself to be the Christ, the Son of God, by His wisdom and His mighty works and by His powerful words and preaching. This is true today just as much as it was on that day so long ago. The person who is unbelieving knows, almost intuitively, because of the sinful independence of their nature, that if they admit even the possibility that Jesus Christ was sent from God; then they must listen to Him and submit to Him. If they concede that He was God made manifest in the flesh; that He is the wisdom and the power of God, because God granted Him these things in the fullest measure according to His purpose and plan to save a people from their sins; people know, I am saying, that they should not only believe in Him, but they should submit to Him, and be guided in their life by the things that He and His apostles taught, which things are written down in the Bible. And further, the unbelieving person knows and understands that if he concedes that there is the fullness of wisdom and power which is found in Christ, and that God alone gave it to Him; it was not taught to Him or given to Him by any man; then they would also have to concede that there is a way that God saves, equips, and teaches men by His Spirit which raises them up to become real Christians through the New Birth. And believing that, they would even have to concede that with some men, God equips them to preach and teach others in such a way that God Himself actually saves them from their sins and builds them up, and makes them strong by faith. They would then have to believe and accept the fact that all men are sinfully lost and blind and must believe in Jesus Christ in order to know God and have eternal life. They would have to confess that no man, apart from God's grace, has the power to bestow either. This is the difference

between a true Christian and a person who is not really a Christian, but who is trying to be a Christian and live the Christian life according to their own thoughts, their own earthly wisdom and their own human power. It is not possible to become a true Christian in that way. It is not possible to live the true Christian life in that way. This is why Jesus marveled over them. They would rather ask the questions concerning Him to other people, than come to Him directly to ask the question, "What must I do to be saved?"

This is also why there are so many seminaries and churches which are liberal in our nation today. People want to believe that becoming a minister is attained by going to an institution of higher learning and getting a degree in that pursuit of wisdom and knowledge which comes by the study of many books written by men. They try to analyze the Bible without the Spirit of God being their teacher and helper. They are trying to find wisdom apart from God's giving it to them. They are trying to teach people how to know God better and how to minister to people in a church setting with a without the truth of the Bible being the ultimate textbook, and without Christ being seen as the wisdom and power of God, who will reveal Himself to the sincere seeker and by His Spirit teach them Himself. The instructors and the books in such seminaries may teach a person many things about people, but they will never convey anything of real spiritual substance about God and Christ. They will never delve deeply into why Christ had to die, or give the wisdom which will lead to salvation. If, through the teaching of men and books, you learn Christ; then you have found true teachers. But if they teach you simply principles of worldly wisdom and deny that you must be given the power and wisdom from above to see your need of the Lord coming and doing a mighty work in your sinful heart so that you can come to know God and please God; then they are false. Let me ask you if you have learned this precious and all important truth? There is an earthly wisdom that questions the wisdom and power of Christ so that it can remain independent from submission to God and His Word. And some people will call that true religion. But I assure you, that no person shall enter the kingdom of heaven independently of Christ's wisdom and power being believed and received to themselves. Unbelief truly is blind to the idea that Christ is the wisdom of God personified.

Secondly - Unbelief greatly resists the idea of Christ's lowliness and poverty. (Verses 3 and 4)

Those people who were at the synagogue that day 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?" "So they were offended at Him." What were they saying there? They were saying that Jesus was just a lowly carpenter and as such, why should they consider Him anybody special and listen to Him as a prophet? Did he not grow up around there? Hadn't they all seen Him and His brothers and sisters and mother, and known what they were like? They thought to themselves; He is not of a Levitical or priestly descent. His prophetic calling has not been established by the authorities and leaders of our religion. Why should we then recognize Him in that same way that we recognize all of our spiritual leaders if He has started His following all on His own?

Besides, they would think to themselves, they are all from such a poor family. They are a lowly family in Israel. If He is so smart, then why isn't He rich? And thus, they were very prejudiced against Him. The text says that they were offended by Him. They thought that His ministry was very presumptuous.

The thing that you and I must remember about an unbelieving heart is that it very often allows itself to be overly impressed with fleshly credentials. A person, in order to be listened to, in their minds, and heeded as a prophet, must have gone to school to study and have obtained a degree. He is expected to be very gifted in the art of persuading people to his views, in order to think about going into the ministry. In the minds of some, he has to have the right background, the right lineage, the right occupation if he is going to be someone who speaks for God, in their thinking. In His case, Jesus was the Son of God, and yet because He was a man who was born of a carpenter, and worked at that lowly occupation, and became a carpenter during His growing up years; His own hometown people were offended at the idea that such a man with such a background should teach them. This lowly background and poverty and lack of formal education; these in their minds disqualified Him to be seen as the Messiah, the deliverer of His people from Roman domination. This "Man's" credentials were not impressive enough to them to even think about submitting to His teaching as a Prophet. They might be impressed with His gifts and His wisdom, but they knew in their hearts that He would never be their choice to be the Messiah or even a popular prophet. There are many people like this today in many of the churches in our own land. There are many who will only respect and listen carefully to an intellectual seminary-trained man in the ministry. If a man doesn't have an M. Div. or a PhD. behind his name; even if he does have great gifts and a good heart, he won't be able to rise in some people's esteem and consideration as one whom they should listen to, and heed what he says, on behalf of God.

But this is not the way that the Lord God Almighty thinks about things. Our God believed that it was the best possible occupation for His only-begotten Son to be in, before He began His public ministry, to be a carpenter. And because he was a only a carpenter people were not impressed by him. But God has His ways of raising up men to the ministry which are often somewhat different than what we conceive. "His ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts," He says to us in Isaiah 55: 8. It is the object of the Christian life to become more and more conformed to the image of our Savior. Our object is not to impress other people with our worldly wisdom and fleshly abilities. Ours is to become more like Him. God the Father did not want His Son to go through the Jewish seminaries of that day. He had another kind of school to attend. Turn over to Philippians 2: 5 with me. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men, and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." "Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those

in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Lest you think that you cannot become like Christ more and more, after you become a Christian by faith in His death on your behalf, take notice of what it says here. "Let this mind be in you..." You are to have the same mindset as Christ when He came in His incarnation into this fallen world of sin. He knew and understood His high position of being nothing less than God. It was not robbery of God or His glory, on Christ's part to think so. And yet He did not come proclaiming His own greatness. Instead, the text says, He did three very important things which you and I are called to do also, as Christians. He "made Himself of no reputation, He humbled Himself and became obedient, and then He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." That is; He wasn't concerned to be someone great in the eyes of men. He chose obscurity in their sight and familiarity in God's sight. This did not mean that He did not have friends or companions, but as you know, He chose them carefully. And He taught them this mindset of no reputation, no pride, and obedience unto death.

This mindset; if we would follow our Lord Jesus Christ, is something that you and I need to have. He came to know and to understand how fitting it was that the man who was the carpenter of Nazareth, the man who made wood products for the people of that city; the man who worked on their houses, should grow up to become obedient to the point of death on a cross of wood. His working with wood in a humble obscure way paved the way, and helped Him very much to have the discipline that He needed, to have a growing obedience to His Father in heaven. He consciously chose to seek out the fellowship and approval of God, in His work, in order that He might do a good job for other people in a holy way, rather than trying to seek out and find the approval of the men of his community, religious or otherwise so that He could enhance His reputation. He no doubt learned the value of persevering in hard work and continuing every day to be diligence in that work by being a carpenter. He was able to learn patience and see how things could fit together in a right way so that things of value and beauty could be made. He learned how to be content in that lowly state; working hard but not trying to push Himself forward as somebody great. He learned that God's time to raise a man up was perfect. He did not have to thrust Himself forward, saying, "Don't you see My greatness?" He learned carefulness and thoughtfulness in His work. He learned to think in the right and holy way about how others could be benefited by His doing good work, careful work, and thoughtful work for them; all to the glory of God, rather than by just trying to please them as men. His goal was to please God. This is one of the most important principles of living the Christian life.

I would speak to all of us, but I would especially speak to young people here this morning. It is a very great temptation to think that if you can just win the approval of other men, if you can just drink in everything that they can teach you, and then learn to impress them with something that you can do very well; then you are making progress. You may indeed make progress in the world eyes, in this fashion, but you will never make progress in God's eyes in that way. Why? Because God is not looking

for you to be a man-pleaser or one who seeks after the world's idea of greatness and glory. God would have you to please Him and seek for His eternal glory. And neither is God looking to use proud, self-confident, or self-made men. He wants you to agree to let Him make you over into the image of Christ. He is looking for a humble servant, one who will look to Him by faith; one who will ask God to help him to be so, and one who sees his goal as trying to obtain the A.U.G. degree. Approved unto God. "Study to show yourself (Be diligent to present yourself) approved unto God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, accurately handling the Word of truth." This is not one of those phony degrees that sometimes men give out, on line, in return for spending a little money and a little time studying for it. It is the highest of degrees that He gives. He only gives it to those who will practically apply themselves to humbling themselves and becoming obedient to the point of death. You say, "Isn't that a little radical?" Yes it is my friend, but Jesus' words are no less radical. Unless a man deny himself and pick up his cross daily and follow Me, He cannot be My disciple. Is that what you are shooting for? To lose your life that you might find it? For if that is the case, then you will probably not be approved of, or thought wise by men. They may reject you, they may despise you, they may laugh at you. But if you are wise, you are not really very concerned about this. You know that people did this with Jesus. "He was despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." He knew, as He once said to His disciples, "No man can serve two masters." That statement is found in Luke 16: 13, and I want you to turn over there with me to see it in the context.

Here Jesus says, "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other." "You cannot serve God and mammon." "Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided him." And He said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts." "For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God." What Jesus was saying here the Pharisees derided. They turned up their noses at it. They were lovers of money and they thought that they could serve God and money. They highly esteemed money and doing all they could to make more money. They loved to mix their making money with their supposed service to God. But much of this was based on their covetousness and greed. And so Jesus enunciates a principle here for us to consider. "For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination to God." This principle applies to those think that they can serve God and money. There is no doubt of that. But it goes much farther than just money. It applies to "what is highly esteemed among men." What is often highly esteemed by men is sinful selfishness. What is highly esteemed by men is to manifest a skeptical unbelief to this life being a preparation for death, the judgment and what lies beyond it. This, often men do not want to consider. Their thoughts are all wrapped up with what they will do when they get out of church, to enjoy themselves and to follow their own selfish interests rather than God's. The Apostle Paul's comment concerning the faithfulness of Timothy in Philippians is really quite amazing. He says in Chapter 2, verse 20, "For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state." "For all seek their own, not the things which are of

Christ Jesus." "But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served me in the gospel." This is the same kind of thing that Jesus was marveling over in relation to his relatives and his home-town acquaintances. He marveled at their unbelief in that they all sought their own, not the things of Christ. Here in our text in Mark 6, Jesus was marveling at their unbelief because their interests were merely worldly interests and selfish interests. They were not concerned to receive His wise and powerful ministry to them. What about you? Whether you are not a Christian yet, or whether you are, you need to be warned about the eternal dangers of unbelief. And this leads me to -

The 3rd Characteristic of Unbelief - Unbelief seldom understands how it limits Christ's blessings. (Verses 5 and 6)

Verse 5 says, "Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them." In Matthew's gospel it says, "Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief." You must not believe that Jesus did not have the power to do those miracles that He had been doing in Capernaum and in other places. It is just that; because of the many people who didn't believe in Him; people who had every reason to believe in Him and didn't, that God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together knew that it would not be right to bestow such marvelous and wonderful blessings upon those who showed themselves unworthy of them, because of their unbelief. They were actually guilty of limiting the blessings coming to themselves from the Holy One of Israel by their unbelief. In closing, each of us must be careful not to do the same with our Lord Jesus Christ. If we are privileged to sit under the means of grace in the ministry of the Word, and do not come to believe and receive the truths which are preached, which are intended to save and build up our souls; whose fault is that? It is not God's or Christ's. For if we have faith and exercise it and act upon it, God will give many, many blessings of grace and power to do His will, and rejoice in doing it. We will know more and more of that wonderful fellowship and communion with the Father and the Son, and will not grieve the Holy Spirit. If great and good spiritual things are not taking place in your life; the distinct possibility exists that unbelief is the cause of it. Look into your heart and ask yourself if you are believing in the wisdom and the power of Jesus Christ, and believingly looking into His Word to lay hold of the promises of all that He will give to you and all He will do in you by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is not a matter of whether Christ can do these things for you and in you, and through you. It is whether you will believe Him or not. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and forever." "Amen."