

few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief" [Mark 6:5]. When Mark writes that Jesus could not do mighty works there in Nazareth that doesn't mean He was unable in the sense that He lacked the supernatural power to do so, but Jesus simply chose to do His miracles there only in response to faith, and as there was no faith but unbelief for the most part, the result was the people's unbelief prevented Jesus from fully exercising His almighty power. Their unbelief locked out God, limited God, or "blocked the supernatural" as one put it. The hardened unbeliever despises and minimizes the blessings and works of God, and since Jesus' miracles were especially of benefit in the way of faith and for the strengthening of faith, Jesus would not perform them in Nazareth simply to entertain the people, or satisfy ungodly curiosity. God never promises blessings of His almighty saving power to those who will live and walk in unbelief....unbelief locks out God and His saving works.

What a true and relevant and horrible description of unbelief! Come see what wickedness and foolishness all unbelief is before God and His Word and His Gospel of Jesus Christ. We are studying unbelief for belief, you remember. The way to recall and never forget the characteristics of unbelief is to think of the word FOOL. An unbeliever is a fool whether he or she knows it or not, or will admit it or not. Are you perhaps living in unbelief, and thus a fool, as the people of Nazareth, F-fighting the evidence about Jesus, O-objecting to the gospel with side issues, O-offended with Jesus and Him crucified and risen again, L-Locking out God and limiting/blocking His almighty and saving work in your life?

This passage about the characteristics of unbelief as shown in the people of Nazareth can help us discern unbelief in our own hearts and lives and help us in relating to unbelievers all around us. Let us see unbelief for what it is and let no one excuse it in their own life. Let us hold high the gospel message regardless of the unbelief of all too many people.

With our text describing unbelievers and their unbelief is the implied Holy Spirit call, 'Come to the Savior, Jesus Christ the Lord'! He is the only Saviour from all sin and misery, and you and I may receive mercy freely offered by God through Him, as many as come to Him, in faith and repentance. Don't be a FOOL and continue unbelieving! The Lord in and through Christ Jesus will freely and abundantly pardon all who come to Him in repentance and faith, and with Him, through His precious blood shed on sinner's behalf there is fullness of life here and now, and eternal life with God hereafter.

Facing unbelief FOR belief! May God, the Holy Spirit, so bless His Word to each and all. Amen.

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**October 23, 2005**

Publication No.230

**BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST**

*Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America*

*Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)*



### FACING UNBELIEF FOR BELIEF

Matthew 13 ends with telling us how the people in Jesus' own hometown village of Nazareth didn't and wouldn't believe on Him. We are told in verse 57, "the people were offended in Him." Matthew, led by the Holy Spirit, writes about this not that any of us would follow that sad example, but that you and I truly believe and increasingly believe in Jesus and follow after Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. So let us think about facing unbelief for belief! See what unbelief is and how the unbeliever is described in God's Word. Let us face unbelief for the purpose of belief!

Our text tells us that after Jesus preaches His series of parables on the kingdom of heaven, He left the area of Capernaum and returned again to His home village of Nazareth. As His custom was, He taught there in the synagogue and we are told the people of His hometown were duly impressed with His wisdom and they commented on His ability to do great and mighty works, but instead of believing on Him, they were offended at Him. In the Greek, that verb in verse 57 is in the so-called Imperfect tense, meaning a verb tense of continued action; this as their ongoing mindset towards Jesus. They kept thinking of Jesus as a scandal of sorts and they did not and would not believe on Him, leading also to Jesus' proverbial saying, in verse 57, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and in his own house."

Looking at this passage closer, notice with me the following four characteristics of unbelief. We see clearly from the text that unbelief, for one, FIGHTS THE EVIDENCE. Verse 54 relates how the people were astonished, just so amazed, with Jesus' teaching ability. His vast knowledge and incredible wisdom astonished them indeed, and that Jesus did many mighty works, they admitted too, and wondered about how He could do so. So the evidence was there that Jesus was truly great beyond measure, and that there was something supernatural about His teaching and miracles....but unbelief fights the evidence and does not and will not own Christ as Saviour and Lord. Those who heard and saw Jesus did not reject Him for lack of evidence, but in spite of overwhelming evidence! They did not reject Him because they lacked the truth, but because they rejected the truth.

Unbelief's character is fighting the evidence. Are you fighting the evidence of God as Creator God and Christ Jesus as only Saviour from sin sent by God to us as the Bible teaches? Are you suppressing the gospel truth and the only reasonable gospel teaching of the Christian faith? Unbelief always is about fighting the evidence. It is not that there isn't enough and plenty of evidence, but it is refusing to bow under all the evidence given.

Notice next about unbelief, how when people live that way, not only do they fight the evidence, but unbelief OBJECTS WITH SIDE ISSUES and irrelevant rabbit trails, you might say, trying to give logical basis for their unbelief. Can you name the objections raised to Jesus and believing on Him in our Scripture passage that really were beside the point? What did they focus on concerning Jesus? They concentrated on His humble origin and His lack of formal education, and that Jesus was not someone recognized or accepted by the religious hierarchy of the day. You see the people found these excuses for their unbelief. The commonness of Jesus' family and the history of the family in their community even made it almost impossible that Jesus **could be someone other**, and they refused to acknowledge Jesus for Who He really was, coming up with all these objections with side issues about Him. Does this characteristic of unbelief strike a cord with you too, as being so true to the way it is?

In this regard, how right on is what someone wrote: "It is tragic that small issues can be used as great excuses for not believing. The people of Nazareth were like people throughout the history of the church who can find every foolish reason to justify their rejection of the gospel. They don't like the attitude of the one who witnesses to them; they think most church people are hypocrites; they think the preacher is too loud or too soft, too stuffy or too overbearing [or too doctrinal and not very practical]; and the services are too formal or too informal, [too long or too short]. They are offended at the slightest things Christians do [or don't do] and construct the insignificant as being all important. They put up one smoke screen after another to excuse their unwillingness to believe the clear and demanding claims and promises of Christ. As a means of escape or self-justification, unbelief diverts attention away from the truth. Are you aware of and discerning about this wicked characteristic of unbelief?"

The character of unbelief, wherever it occurs, is fighting the evidence, objecting with side issues, and notice next, it is just OFFENDED WITH JESUS. Verse 57 specifically states this, how the people in their unbelief were offended with Jesus, meaning they stumbled over and refused to accept that someone so ordinary could be so extraordinary, someone so common to them could be One sent from God for them. They were offended that someone so like them could yet be so unlike them and that they needed Him to be their Saviour and Lord. Unbelief stumbles over the need to have no one other than and no one less than, or more than, Jesus to save them from their sins. Unbelief refuses to accept the need of salvation alone

through the ministry and blood of Jesus Christ. We read in I Corinthians 1 that for the Jew by nature, the preaching of Christ crucified as the one and only means of our salvation is a stumbling block, and for the Greeks it is foolishness... "*But to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God.*" So likewise Peter writes in I Peter 2 how to those who believe, Jesus is most precious, "*but to those who are disobedient*"...Jesus becomes a "*stone of stumbling and a rock of offence. They stumble being disobedient to the word...*"

Unbelief is offended with Jesus. 'What? Do I need to be saved and surrender myself and submit myself to One Who was not only born in a stable, but was raised in Nazareth, a carpenter's son, and Mary's son,' they said, perhaps a reference to what the people thought was an illegitimate child of hers, and 'Must I put my trust in one who is rejected by the elite and ultimately would die on a cross among famous criminals? No way!' You see, unbelief is offended with *Jesus and Him crucified* and scoffs at *needing* such a Saviour, and is offended with a gospel that speaks of total dependency upon the Lord alone, and not being able to contribute a single contribution to our salvation. Unbelief is offended in a Jesus Who speaks of salvation by grace alone through faith alone based on Him alone. Unbelief refuses to take seriously the guilt and corruption of our sins and sinfulness, and the absolute holiness and justice of God and that only Jesus sent from God can bridge the gap. Unbelief would rather follow manmade religions of works and rituals and lots of show than be dependent on a humble carpenter's son, Who would be eventually nailed to a tree, and hung in open shame for all to see and mock. Are you offended with Jesus as the way, the truth and the life and the only way to the Father? The people of Nazareth persisted in rejection of Jesus, for the visit here in Matthew 13, going by Luke 4, is actually a second time Jesus visited Nazareth and a second time that He is not accepted there.

Unbelief is offended with Jesus and His Word. Don't we, in fact, see that all around us today, also with the many religions in our time? When there is unbelief in your heart, is this characteristic not also there that you are offended with the simple, self-humbling, God-exalting, grace proclaiming gospel of Jesus Christ?

One other and last characteristic of unbelief that our text passage clearly brings out is that not only does it fight the evidence and object with side issues, and is offended with Jesus, but it LOCKS OUT GOD AND HIS MIGHTY WORK. The last verse in the chapter reads, "*Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.*" We know the Lord Jesus did do miracles sometimes where no belief was found, but He chose not to perform them where there was hard and willful unbelief against Him.

Unbelief, then, as the people of Nazareth showed it, became a barrier to divine blessing. Mark, in his gospel account, says it even stronger, "*Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a*