

The Gospel According to Mark Astonishment and Unbelief

Mark 6:1-6

Sunday, August 23, 2020

Introduction

Because of the time and place in which we live there are many people who have a perceived familiarity with Jesus. That's to say that they know some things about Jesus, but they don't know Him truly or fully.

Sadly there are many who reject Jesus even though what they know of Him may not be accurate or complete. Or perhaps a fuller revelation of who He is doesn't fit with who they've previously understood Him to be. This is the case in Mark 6 when Jesus returns to His hometown of Nazareth.

Context – Where the Story fits in the Gospel of Mark

As we come to Mark chapter 6 we come to a transition point in the Gospel. In the preceding section Mark has described a series of events that reveal the power and deity of Jesus. We've seen who He is and we've also seen many who responded to Him in faith.

But beginning in the first part of chapter 6 we read of many who don't see Jesus rightly or fully and who don't believe. In fact, some of those who had the opportunity to know Jesus the best are the ones who have the hardest time believing that He is who He claims to be.

The Return to Nazareth

After spending most of His ministry up to this point in Capernaum and along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus now returns to His hometown of Nazareth. This was a small community and a place where Jesus would have been well known. But what we find is that people's familiarity with Jesus doesn't lead to faith, but in most cases the opposite: they reject Him and are offended by Him.

In this short account we see the people's response to Jesus: astonishment and unbelief. And then we see Jesus's response to them: astonishment at their unbelief.

The Response of the People to Jesus – Astonishment and Unbelief (6:1-3)

- **The nature of their astonishment** – As Jesus teaches in the Synagogue the people of Nazareth are astonished, but not in positive sense like when He taught in the Capernaum Synagogue (Mark 1:22, 27).

In this case they are astonished because His teaching with wisdom and authority seem inconsistent with who they have known Him to be – a man of common occupation (a carpenter), of uncertain birth (the Son of Mary) and from a common family (they knew His brothers and sisters).

- **The result of their astonishment – They took offense at Him** – Their astonishment didn't lead to faith but to offense. While others were drawn to Jesus by His teaching the Nazarenes grew callous toward Him.
 - **Jesus as an offense** - The word 'offense' is often used in the New Testament to refer to people's response to Christ. Paul uses a form of this word when He describes Jesus as a stone of stumbling for the Jews (Rom. 9:32-33; 1 Cor. 1:22-24). Mark also records Jesus' use of this word in the parable of the four soils. There are some who, although they appear to believe for a time, *stumble* or *fall away* (Mark 4:16-17).
- **Application** – Many people are just like the people of Nazareth: they hear of Jesus but don't accept who He says He is. They may be astonished as they learn about Him, but it's not a positive astonishment. Perhaps He doesn't fit who they think He should be. They stumble over His claims are offended by His message.

The Response of Jesus to the People – Astonishment at their Unbelief (6:4-6)

Mark records three things about the response of Jesus to the unbelief of the people of the Nazareth:

- **An acknowledgement of their unbelief** – Jesus starts by quoting a well-known proverb that affirms that prophets are often rejected in their own town and by their own people. This was the experience of Jesus (e.g. Mark 3:21), and ultimately His rejection by His own would lead to His death. In a way this account is a foreshadowing of what is to come (John 1:9-11).
- **The result of their unbelief** – Mark records that because of their unbelief Jesus could do no mighty works. This does not mean that Jesus was incapable (He is God and can do as He wills). But Jesus chooses to respond to those who come to Him in faith, and Nazareth was marked by unbelief (see Matthew 13:58).
- **Jesus's astonishment at their unbelief** – Jesus was not surprised by their unbelief, but it did cause Him to marvel. It is astonishing to consider that a people could know Him so well, and be so familiar with Him, and yet not believe. (See Luke 7:9 for the only other example of Jesus marveling)

Summary – Jesus has come and has revealed Himself as God and as the Savior of all who believe. Yet while some respond in faith, others find Jesus and His Gospel offensive. While some are very familiar with Jesus or think they know who He is, they still cannot see Him as the One they need.

The people of Nazareth knew Jesus but were unable to see Him for who He really is. We must be faithful in looking to the Scriptures and learning to follow and proclaim the true Christ. The unbelief of the Nazarenes should be a reminder to us to know Jesus rightly and trust Him fully. May it never be said of us that Jesus marvels at our unbelief.