

THE DANGER OF UNBELIEF (Mk. 6:1-6)

Mark 6:1 And he went out from thence [*i.e. Capernaum, ch. 5*], and came into his own country [*Nazareth*]; and his disciples follow him. [*God's own country! ... Gen. 1:31* And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. ... *Ps. 19:1* The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. ... *Is. 11:1* And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: **2** And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD; **3** And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: **4** But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. **5** And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins. **6** The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. **7** And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. **8** And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. **9** They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea. ... *Rev. 21:1* And I saw a new heaven and a new earth ... **24** And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. **25** And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. **26** And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it. **27** And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.] ...

2 And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? **3** Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joseph, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. **4** But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. **5** And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. **6** And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.

Only twice do the Gospels describe Jesus as being amazed and marvelled, to the point of admiration (*θαυμάζω*) ... The first occasion was when He *marvelled* at the faith of the centurion whose servant was lying at home gravely ill, and the centurion pleaded with Jesus, **Mt. 8:8** Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed ... **10** When Jesus heard it, he marvelled. ... He marvelled at the centurion's *belief*. The other occasion when we read about Jesus being amazed is here in His home town of Nazareth ...

among the people with whom He had grown up ... and He marvelled because of their *unbelief*..

We often quote the words of Jesus, **Mt. 17:20** *If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. ... Yes, faith is powerful but *unbelief* is also tremendously powerful. Unbelief is so compelling it extends throughout eternity. Unbelief permeates every orifice of human existence. It is dynamic. It is persuasive ... Unbelief convinces the unbeliever to repel and reject what ought clearly to be accepted.*

For example, there is a series of frightening judgments in Rev. 16, - the pouring out of the vials of the wrath of God upon the unbelieving earth (v.1). The first vial afflicts those who *had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image* (v.2). The second vial polluted the oceans and the seas and the rivers (v.5,6). The fourth vial affected the heat coming from the sun and made it unbearable (v.8), **9** *And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.* **10** *And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, **11** And blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds. ... Despite the reality of the sufferings and the judgments unbelief was the powerful and destructive force by which the people denied God and His authority ... We see it around us today ... And Jesus also saw it for Himself in His hometown of Nazareth.*

It was, of course, unbelief that introduced sin into the Garden of Eden because Eve heeded the words of the serpent who cast doubt on God's Word. It was unbelief in the wilderness that kept the Israelites from the Promised Land because they refused to trust the promises of God. It was the unbelief of the Pharisees that rejected Jesus as Messiah ... but there is always something so much more poignant when the people before whom you live do not believe in you ... and that was the issue Jesus had to face, among those with whom He had grown up.

To believe, though, is something you *must* do in order to become a Christian, - to be a Christian you *must* earnestly and confidently believe in Jesus Christ as your Saviour and Lord ... **Jn. 3:16** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ... Acts 16:31* *And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved ... Rom. 10:9* *That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ... To believe is a mighty*

thing to be able to do! ... I watched people hanging off the CN Tower in Toronto on a rope 1,168 feet above the ground, - I could do that if I believed! ... I assure you I did not do it for I did not have the faith or confidence to do it ... And here is the only way you are able to have such a great faith to believe in Jesus ... It was when the Holy Spirit first begins to work in your heart and *brings* you to that place where you *will* believe. ... It takes a greater faith to believe in God for salvation than it takes to believe in anything else because it 'goes against the grain' of our sinful nature.

And so Jesus was in the midst of a people *gripped* in unbelief. They were in the synagogue, - the centre of their religion in Nazareth, - and yet they would not believe because they couldn't ... because of their unbelief! During their order of service in the synagogue they would have stood with great respect as the Law was being read ... but yet they were strangers to God's grace. They prided themselves in being believers but what they were believing was of no benefit to their soul's eternal salvation, - they were simply unbelieving believers!

Many religious people are sadly in that category. They don't mean to be. It's not their intention ... and you would hurt them severely if you pointed the observation out to them. Nevertheless, you don't come to know God through a mere religion, or through anything within your capability ... you only come to know and to love Him through a personal and living relationship, initiated by the powerful work of the Holy Spirit.

Notice how these people were astonished (Mk. 5:42; 6:2, ἐκπλήσσω, they were caught off guard ... this was outside of their sphere of experience and comfort) ... But if you had life in you at all, you could not fail to be astonished when you watched and listened to Jesus! He was like nothing anyone had ever seen before! And yes, there was deep interest and curiosity but that is not the same as falling down on your knees, repenting of your sin and trusting in Him for salvation. ... Thrill-seeking doesn't save. Great exhibitions of some apparent spiritual power doesn't save either ... If there is no repentance, there is no salvation ... These people saw what Jesus was saying and doing ... but they were determined *not* to believe!

Look closely and you will see the depth of unbelief there was, - not even his own brothers and sisters believed! In fact, previously they had laid **hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself (Mk. 3:21)**. ... And when your family don't believe you, it hurts ... and also, how would you expect anyone else to believe you?! ... But

again we can find parallels in the Old Testament, for example, Joseph's brothers (Gen. 37) and David's brothers (I Sam. 17).

I suppose, - looking at it from a very ordinary perspective, - Jesus had lived among these people as a carpenter (**Mk. 6:3** *Is not this the carpenter*) ... and now, - lo and behold, - He was standing in front of them *in the synagogue* preaching with such power and authority. ... You could understand the people asking, Where did He learn all that from?! And how did He come about attracting all those great numbers they were hearing about in other places? He hadn't done any miracles in Nazareth, but they had heard about the miracles He was doing in the surrounding countryside ... And they would have been trying to process all this in their minds.

Luke tells us about it also, **Lk. 4:16** *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. 17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. ... I am this Messiah, He was telling them ... 21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears. 22 And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, Is not this Joseph's son? 23 And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. 24 And he said, Verily I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country. ... He knew it was inevitable they would *not* receive Him! ... 28 And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, 29 And rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. 30 But he passing through the midst of them went his way, 31 And came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them on the sabbath days. 32 And they were astonished at his doctrine: for his word was with power. ... That is how *powerful* unbelief is! The evidence was in front of them and they still would not believe! **Jn. 1:11** *He came unto his own, and his own received him not.**

What about the disciples in all this? Here they were with Jesus in His hometown, - familiar territory, - and Jesus was basically making next-to-nothing of it! There weren't any massive crowds to see Him in Nazareth ... not much interest. They had not come to see Jesus for they would have been in the synagogue anyway ... so Jesus wasn't the attraction. His family weren't overly appreciative either, - all-

in-all, it was a bit of a disaster from the human perspective. ... At least, though, they recognised Him as a rabbi ... and so He was allowed to speak on the Sabbath in their synagogue. And they recognised how gifted He was for He wasn't talking 'above their heads' but He was speaking directly into their hearts.

Ah, but wait a moment ... Back to those questions again ... Where *did* He get His training? He hadn't gone to a rabbinical school and sat at the feet of renowned rabbinical scholars, - He had no degrees or formal education. All they had ever known Jesus to do was to be a carpenter ... taught the craft by His father Joseph. True, they were astounded at His teaching but they were not so astounded as to be convinced, and they were determined not to be convinced! ... *That is unbelief!*

And their unbelief was obscuring the obvious, - there are none so blind as those who *will* not see! He preached powerfully in the synagogue, but they would not believe. All they could say was, ² *From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?* ... The evidence was there but they would not believe! ... Even if they *could* have believed, they *wouldn't!*

They asked the question, "Where's all this coming from?" ... But they were not prepared to accept the truth that this same Jesus Christ, - Who was dwelling among them, **Jn. 1:14** *we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth,* - no, they would not accept Him ... no matter how obvious it was.

That is what unbelief does, - it clouds the reality. It seeks to close out the light. That is how powerful it is, - it obscured the obvious, and it also elevated the irrelevant, ³ *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?* ... What is that got to do with anything?! Is there something wrong with having been a carpenter? Should His mother not have been called Mary? Should He not have belonged to a family with brothers and sisters! ... He came from Nazareth ... *so what?!* ... That has nothing to do with anything! That's irrelevant!

But that was how ridiculous their unbelief was making them, - there was neither rhyme nor reason in their analysis! But that is what unbelief does when it comes to spiritual things, such as the subject of receiving Christ and His offer of mercy. In fact, the psalmist explained, **Ps. 53:1** *The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good.* Here

are these people and they were obscuring the obvious and elevating the irrelevant, when it came to how they confronted Jesus.

And that is exactly what they did, - they confronted Jesus ... They assaulted Him *verbally*, - **3** *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him, ... ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. ... He was a scandal, a ‘stumbling-block’. ... The apostle Paul uses this word in I Cor. 1:23, But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock (σκάνδαλον) ... It’s the same word, - Jesus was a ‘stumbling-block’ to His fellow-Jews so that they could not and would not believe in Him! ... As far as they were concerned, they believed He was speaking blasphemy ... and they ‘stumbled’ over Who He really was, **Jn. 1:10** He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. **11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ...*

How difficult and how heart-wrenching this must have been for the Saviour ... to see His own family and His own townspeople refusing Him. Listen to the hurt in His voice, **4** *But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house. ... See how it affects Him, - that is the second time in just a few verses that the Gospel-writer emphasises “His own country” ... in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

And it had a bearing on Jesus amongst them, **5** *And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them. ... What is that saying? Is it saying that because they would not believe, Jesus was powerless to work miracles? No, that is not what Mark is teaching us here because God is always more powerful, no matter what the situation. No, it wasn’t a ‘power’ problem, - Jesus had not momentarily or temporarily lost any of His power to heal, - the people of Nazareth could not diminish the power of Christ one whit. Instead, it was a ‘purpose’ problem. In other words, He didn’t carry out any miracles because the purpose of miracles was to demonstrate the truth ... but since these people had made up their minds to reject the truth, there was no point or need for any miracles.*

So Jesus left them ... because they chose unbelief. Sin obscures the blatantly obvious, and it also elevates the ridiculously irrelevant. It casts common sense and decency ‘out the window’ ... and it is why people are so willing to accept just about anything ... but when you start to talk with them about Jesus and salvation, their ‘heckles rise’ immediately! ... And that is what happened in Nazareth on that Sabbath day. And the frightening conclusion was that they didn’t want Jesus,

so Jesus gave them what they wanted ... and He left them, **6 And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.**

On another occasion the Lord said, **Lk. 12:48 For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.** Those words speak to the unbeliever and also to the believer. To the unbeliever, it trumpets the warning that if you spurn all the privileges and opportunities you have been blessed with, you will be answer for your unbelief before God. You have heard the Gospel so many times ... You have been taught Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of sinners and yet, - like the people in Nazareth, - you have turned your back on Him and chosen not to receive Him. .. That is serious! Despite all the opportunities to believe, it could be said of you also, **6 And he marvelled because of [your] unbelief.** ... And then, look what Jesus did ... He went away and left them *in* their unbelief for we read, **And he went round about the villages, teaching.** ... He went away off somewhere else to tell others.

As far as the Christian is concerned, **unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required** relates to the service we give to our Master. Remember how Jesus had the disciples with Him, - **Mk. 6:1 And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.** They were watching and they were listening. They saw and heard how Jesus did not quit or change His message. They recorded the determination in His voice and the authority in His Person. ... There would come a time when they would preach the Gospel of repentance and salvation, and they would not be accepted either ... in fact, some of them would be put to death for it! Nonetheless, the Saviour was their example to *keep going on.*

And that is the same for us today, - we are not called to follow Christ out of convenience ... we are called to follow Him out of commitment! 'Convenient' followers will soon give up, whereas committed followers continue to *follow.* May that be the kind of follower of Christ you and I are, because that is the purpose for God saving you ... that you would serve Him faithfully and conscientiously to the glory of His precious and holy Name. Amen.