

The Power of Unbelief

Mark 6:1-13 (03/01/15)

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When you came to Christ, did you go home and try to witness to your family and close friends? That is often a very interesting experience. Carolyn and I grew up in religious homes and were taken to church every Sunday. But then in our early 20s we came to Christ in a real way. Someone brought the gospel to us and we discovered the wages of sin is death but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. We turned from going our own way and received that free gift of salvation. We were saved from the damnation of sin and wanted to tell others, so we took it to our parents. They were happy but kind of wondered what really happened. I took it to the bishop of the church I grew up in and he feared I became a pro-military Baptist hawk. I met with another pastor and he assured me I'd get over it after a while.

Then I tried to witness to my cousin and he reacted in anger and told me not to talk to him about that anymore. He later professed faith in Christ and has since died. I hope he was saved. I tried to witness to my younger brother and he was so embarrassed he didn't know what to say, but I do believe he is a believer. He reads his Bible every morning and attends a church pastored by John Niederhouse in Souderton, Pa. John is from Evansville and his brother attends our church!

One of the hardest places to witness is in your own hometown and to your own family. Jesus knew all about that. Even His brothers didn't believe in Him during His public ministry (John 7:5). The first time Jesus went to His hometown, Nazareth, it didn't go well. Luke 4:16-30 tells about it. He taught in the synagogue, preaching that He Himself was the Messiah Isaiah foretold. They were first impressed, but when He pressed the message and compared them with Gentiles for not believing, they flew into a rage, drug him out to a cliff, and tried to kill him!

Now He is giving them a second chance. But they haven't changed. All He faced was their unbelief. In verse 6 you have an amazing statement, "He wondered at their unbelief!" What a statement. He only wondered at one other thing, and that was the faith of the centurion in Luke 7:9 – "I have not found such great faith in all Israel!" But here when returning to his hometown, He wondered at their unbelief.

Unbelief is a powerful thing! It is the default condition of the lost man's heart, dark in unbelief. Lost people are ruled by unbelief; believers are plagued by it and have to fight for faith. Let's look at the power of unbelief in this last visit to Nazareth. Here are four lessons to challenge our hearts and help us as we minister to other people.

Unbelief is often found in the most familiar places – v. 1

Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him.

Jesus and His followers are coming off a really glorious preaching and power tour. They must be filled with excitement as they head southwest from Capernaum to Nazareth, about a 40-mile trip. His followers included the twelve as well as others. There were probably some ladies with Him. He came into Nazareth as a rabbi with His seminary students following Him. That's what rabbis did, called a peripatetic ministry – walking along and teaching as you go. He's training His followers in real life experiences; that's discipleship. Not just sitting in a classroom, but engaging with people and situations.

So now He comes to His hometown, "patrida", His fatherland. It's not a very big village. They say around 500 people. Today Nazareth has around 60,000 people live in the area, mostly Arabs. It's known as the Silican Valley of the Arab community, with 20 high tech companies specializing in software development. But in Jesus' day, Nazareth was small with most people knowing everyone in the village.

Jesus grew up there. He loved His hometown just like we all do, and He wanted to come and give them another opportunity to receive the good news of God's kingdom and that He is the Messiah, fulfilling the prophecies in their Old Testament. This would be the last time He comes back home. The culture in a

village like this is impossible for us to grasp. These Jews were very zealous, passionate, religious, and emotional people. They would not tolerate anything that sounded off the wall, which we saw on His first visit. But here is where Jesus had to stand back and wonder at their unbelief. Unbelief shows up in very familiar places.

Unbelief is often found in the very ministry of the Word of God – vv. 2-3

When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? "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?" And they took offense at Him.

So here comes the Sabbath, it's time to go to church, and that's exactly what Jesus and His people do. He gets in there, and like before, He begins to teach them! That's most of what Jesus did – teach! That's what we do. We teach God's Word. Christianity is a teaching faith. We can't get enough of it. I love what one of our guys prayed the other night in small group, "Thank you for the opportunity to dive into the Word!" We love diving into this treasure chest of truth. Sometimes people say, "Ah, we don't need all this teaching. Let's just live it out." Listen, we naturally get our skulls full of the world's unbelief, don't we? Every day it pounds into our minds. Unbelief demands that we be on the offensive and counter it with truth. We need to learn what the Bible teaches about everything. Romans 12:2 tells us to stop letting the world fill our brains with its unbelief and let God's Word renew our minds.

The amazing thing is how little the average believer in good, Bible-teaching churches actually knows about the Bible. I have Kevin DeYoung's 100 Bible Questions. I'd love to know what the collective score would be if we all took that quiz. I've been giving it in increments to our small group, and of course, they're almost all getting almost 100% every time.

So what happens as Jesus is preaching? They are wowed! They were blown away by this hometown boy. They were amazed at all He knew, His wisdom, His passion, His gripping authority. It was what we call good preaching! And they had heard about those miracles. He's teaching them about how He is the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He is the ark of salvation. All those sacrifices point to Him and all those prophets spoke of Him. And He is calling them to repent and believe in Him, trust in Him, give their lives to Him, follow Him, even worship Him.

Such great preaching! And what's going on in their heads? Instead of embracing the message personally and letting it get traction in their hearts, they're going, "Wait a minute! We know this fellow. Who does He think He is? He's just a blue collar worker!" He was the village "tekton" – carpenter or craftsman, literally the one who makes stuff. He worked with His hands, just like the rest of us regular people. He may have made their chicken coops, or helped build a wall or the synagogue. He was one of those handyman types who knew how to build or fix about anything. Jesus worked for at least 15 years as a carpenter.

Side note, and this is so good – Jesus stamps all legitimate work "sacred." It doesn't matter what you do or work with, wood, metal, paint, wires, pipes, protecting the citizens, administrating or leading a plastics company – it's all spiritual and sacred. Luther blew the whistle on this really well – the lady caring for the home is doing God's work as much as the preacher behind the pulpit. Jesus erased the line between secular and sacred for believers. Colossians 3:23, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."

So here's the carpenter. He has no letters behind his name. We know His mom! We know his four brothers and at least two sisters, which proves the teaching of the perpetual virginity of Mary is false. Some say these are cousins or the Jesus' step-siblings, Joseph's children from an earlier marriage. I don't think so!

So how do the people from Nazareth respond to this powerful preacher? They took offense at Him! Here He is handing them spiritual riches and bringing them the most important thing they will ever hear, and they are scandalized by Him, they trip over Him. How sad this is. They resented Him up there speaking

with authority and telling them what they needed to do, and so ignored His call to repentance. Their hearts are dark with unbelief.

Donald Gray Barnhouse pinches us with these words, "Let us not be too hard on these Nazarenes, but recognize our likeness in them." There are clouds of unbelief in all of our hearts as well.

Unbelief blocks the transforming power of God from your heart and life – vv. 4-6a

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief.

Here is just a sad reality. When you don't humbly receive God's Word on a personal level and apply it to your heart, when you just ignore or run from God's truth, God will not be working mightily in your heart! That's just the way it is! Paul expressed it like this in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, "For this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work **in you who believe.**" Notice, "in you who believe." Listen to our Lord analyzing the unbelief here in Nazareth.

First, you are missing the truth because all you are thinking about is your familiarity with Me. A man may be a great preacher and gain the respect of thousands, but in his hometown with his own family, not so much. The same is true when people lose respect for the preacher. You will get nothing from what he says, especially if you hold a grudge. I can still see a fellow in our first church after we had to deal with some trouble in his family. He continued coming to church, but he didn't like it and would look away toward the wall the entire service. This is one of the neatest things about our church here at Faith Bible. Those of us who preach are so blessed by your love and respect for the Word of God and honoring us for diligently laboring in that Word. One false move or one moral indiscretion ruins that. That's why James 3:1 says, if you are going to teach, you are held to a higher level! But there in Nazareth familiarity closed their hearts to God's Word.

Second, your unbelief is robbing you of what God could be doing in your life. He could not do miracles there, meaning He wouldn't do miracles because they were in no spiritual condition to see them. Jesus didn't do miracles just as a spectacle. He had purpose, and they had subverted that purpose!

Third, Jesus in His heart is amazed at their unbelief. This tells me something about our responsibility to believe! We can never blame God for our unbelief. And the more evidence you have about the truth of the gospel and the reality of God, the more you are accountable to believe. Jesus is thinking, "These people have had a front row seat watching Me grow up in their midst and hearing about all my miracles and hearing my messages, and yet they stubbornly refuse to believe!"

What does Jesus marvel at in your heart? Faith or unbelief? We believers struggle with this, don't we? It's called the fight of faith – to believe and trust God on a day to day basis. Do you receive God's Word with humility, repentance, faith, obedience? Is God's Word actually and really changing your life? As you read and hear God's Word, is it getting traction? How easy to let the Word just roll off, like water off a duck's back, and never let it penetrate and transform us because we are living under the power of unbelief.

Hebrews 3:12-13 warns us, "Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." Unbelief is an evil, powerful thing! It's probably the root of our sinful hearts. Unbelief filled Adam and Eve's hearts and brought the fall of man! Israel spent 40 years wandering around in the wilderness because they refused to believe God's promise. Unbelief rules the lost man's heart.

Unbelief is a human spiritual reality that every disciple must deal with – vv. 6b-13

And He was going around the villages teaching. And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they

should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belt--but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." They went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

Jesus leaves Nazareth for the last time. There is something ominous about this, almost prophetic, as Israel finally will reject her Messiah, have Him crucified, then persecute His followers throughout the book of Acts. And when you get to the end of Acts, there's Paul always going first to the Jews, his brothers according to the flesh, but then turning from them when they reject the gospel and going off to the Gentiles.

Now Jesus sends out His twelve to preach the gospel, to call people to repentance, and He even gives them power to do miracles! He sent them two by two so they could encourage each other, so they could bear witness together, a beautiful picture. As I was sitting at the mall playground with my granddaughter the other week, I noticed a dad sitting nearby and I tried to figure out how to get a gospel talk started with him. Then unexpectedly, one of our church ladies came in with her kids and we struck up a conversation, which was just what I needed to talk with this dad a little bit about spiritual things. He wasn't interested, but so what? I bore witness to Christ and only God knows what will come of it.

Why did Jesus send them out with pretty much nothing and why did he tell them to shake dust off their feet when a village didn't receive them? He wanted them to learn to trust God on their travels. And he wanted the disciples to let those people who rejected the message to know that they had rejected the most important thing in their lives! The disciples' responsibility and our responsibility is not to make people believe. We can't do that. We go as seed "throwers and waterers," trusting God to give the increase. They were to shake the dust off their feet if a village rejected their message. This was a cultural sign of judgment and seeing them as dirty Gentiles, sort of symbolically brushing the Gentile cooties off.

So if you aren't getting anywhere with this person or these persons after you have tried to give them the gospel message, go find someone else to evangelize. The main thing is to go and faithfully tell the gospel. Every one of us in one way or another can do that. These guys didn't have twenty letters behind their names. They hadn't been through Bible college. Just be ready to share the gospel, how God worked in your life. Your opportunity may come while you are sitting waiting to see the dentist or in that grocery store line, who knows.

And don't be discouraged when people are offended and don't receive your message, right? The world doesn't like it! We're to call people to repent, the very thing people don't want to do. No one likes to admit they've been wrong and need to turn around, come to Christ, and start living for God! For unsaved people it's like getting a shot of novacaine in the roof of your mouth. It hurts to admit you've been wrong, but when you do, the light of God's grace floods in and you will see the glory of God and the power of God in your life.

SO WHAT?

What about you? Is God's Word getting traction in your life? Or is unbelief clouding your faith and keeping you from really seeing God work in your life? Are you teachable and applying the Word to your life?

Or is unbelief ruling your heart? Unbelief is a powerful thing and it rules the hearts of every unbeliever. You are living in God's house and yet refuse to believe He built it, owns it, runs it, provides for you in it. Unbelief will destroy you! You may like the comfort and pleasure of unbelief now, but eventually unbelief, the rejection of Christ, will damn your soul!

Remember this simple but profound truth in John 3:36, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."