**Unbelief in Nazareth**  14/1/24dkm

Read: Isaiah 1:1-20, Mark 6:1-12

Text: Mark 6:1-6

Psalms: 67, 4, 139:17-24, 72old

‘Daughter, your faith has made you well’ (5:34). Jesus said this to the woman with the bleeding problem after she approached him in fear yet was healed by Jesus. A man called Jairus expressed similar faith in Jesus and his daughter was actually raised from the dead. Coming to chapter 6 we find a very different response to Jesus; we find unbelief rather than faith, with very few people getting healed by Jesus.

Jesus was rejected when he went across to lake to the Decapolis, and healed a demon-possessed man; this was not a predominately Jewish region. Jairus and the woman with the bleeding problem were from Capernaum which was a Jewish city. Jesus left this city to return home: He ‘came to his own country and His disciples followed Him’ (6:1). Jesus’ home town was Nazareth in the hills of Galilee, just 30kms from Capernaum, and like Capernaum it had a local synagogue. It was a long way from Bethlehem where Jesus was born. Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth some years after Jesus was born.

In the town of Nazareth, Joseph worked as a carpenter or a tradesman, and raised other children born to him and Mary. They were a normal working-class family, until Jesus began his ministry. Already his mother and brothers had been notified of Jesus’ strange behaviour and came to take him home (3:31). Jesus did not reject his earthly family because we see him coming to his home town here in this chapter; he came with his disciples. Matthew records this same visit, but what about Luke? Luke has Jesus preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth and being rejected but seemingly earlier in his ministry. A comparison of the accounts, however, particularly of the proverb quoted by Jesus (6:4, Luke 4:24), points to them being the same visit.

**1. Who is this man?**

Jesus was widely recognised as a rabbi or teacher, even though he had no formal training. He was invited to speak in the synagogue at Capernaum and also here in his home town of Nazareth (6:2). People who heard Jesus teach said that he spoke as no other man; he spoke with wisdom and with authority. The people in Nazareth were no different; they were astonished at what they heard (6:2). They could not believe that this local boy was speaking such profound things. They were amazed because he spoke with such wisdom and learning (6:3). They were not critical of what he preached but simply asked, ‘Where did he get such wisdom?’ They knew he had not studied in any Rabbinic school, so where did he get such knowledge; was it from God, or was it from the devil?

The people of Nazareth also took note of the mighty works or miracles done by Jesus (6:2). Jesus may have done some miracles in Nazareth, although we are later told that he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief (6:5). They had heard about the mighty works Jesus had done in other places. Where did Jesus get the power to perform miracles? Was it from God or was it from the devil?

In assessing the source wisdom and power displayed by Jesus we might think people would look at the evidence itself, and take an objective view. If what Jesus taught was truth and wisdom according to the Scriptures, and the things he did were ‘mighty works’ that no other man could perform, then this man must be from God. The Jews were actually expecting Messiah, the anointed of God, who would save them. In they had read and understood their own Scriptures they would have seen prophecy being fulfilled; Jesus was born in Bethlehem not Nazareth (Micah 5:2).

But the people of Jesus home town found it hard to be objective. All the traditions, gossip, and prejudices present in their town came to mind as they listened to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is this man? They asked in rhetorical questions, ‘Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary’ and, ‘Are not his brothers James, Joses, Judas, and Simon?’ And, ‘Are not his sisters here with us?’ (6:3). These were questions for which the answers were obvious but did not match what they now heard and saw. They knew all about Jesus of Nazareth, but what they knew did not accord with what they were hearing and seeing.

Firstly, Jesus was a carpenter, or the son of a carpenter when he was a young man in Nazareth (6:3, Mat 13:55); there is no confusion here because a son, especially the eldest son, usually learnt the trade of his father. The only confusion was in the minds of the locals who looked down on anyone who worked with their hands. Budding rabbis went to school to study the scriptures; they did not get their hands dirty! It is still like this with Orthodox Jews, and even some Christians, despite the example of Jesus and the apostle Paul.

Secondly, calling Jesus the son of Mary was unusual; boys were known as the son of their father. Joseph may have died, but still this term ‘son of Mary’ was somewhat insulting. Was it that questions about the legitimacy of Jesus’ birth had been circulating? Thirdly, there were the brothers and even sisters of Jesus (6:3). Four brothers are named; two of these appear later in the Bible, James as the leader of the church in Jerusalem, and Judas or Jude as the author of the book in the NT bearing his name.

Clearly, Mary had other children, presumably with Joseph. Again it is unusual that daughters are named. There is no reason whatsoever to claim that these brothers and sisters were not the children of Mary. The people of Nazareth were desperately trying to discount anything in Jesus background that would explain his wisdom and ability to perform miracles. In today’s world, they were doing a thorough internet search on Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, people do such searches today and come up with all manner of theories about Jesus; sadly they trust the internet more than the Bible!

The people of Jesus home town heard words of wisdom and saw mighty works. They were impressed, but would they believe in Jesus? What prevented them from believing in Jesus as the promised Messiah, the Son of God? It was clear, as Jesus would have told them, that he got ‘all these things’ from God. But they stopped looking at Jesus and looked at his family and his humble background; ‘What rabbinic school did he go to?’ They concluded that Jesus was an upstart, if not a fraud, and, ‘They were offended at him’ (6:3). They concluded that they would not be lectured to by a man of such low status in society. They would not listen to this local fellow, despite his wisdom and his works.

**2. Heal just a few**

How did Jesus respond to his own townspeople being offended at him, a person from their own community? I had written ‘offended by what he said and did’, but this was not the case because they were amazed at his words and his works. The offense was irrational, based on who they thought Jesus should have been rather than what Jesus actually was. Such prejudice is not uncommon. Some people cannot even listen to the words of a preacher because of what he is wearing or where he is from. In warning preachers about such offenses, the lecturer spoke of a picture on the wall that distracted him during the sermon because it was not hanging straight!

With Jesus, the people were offended because he was a local boy. Older members of the synagogue may have been offended because he was a young man teaching them, but this is not stated. What is stated is that they knew his background and rejected him because of this. What could Jesus say in response to such irrational reasoning? Jesus spoke a simple proverb to them; ‘A prophet is not without honour except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house is’ (6:4). Matthew does mention ‘relatives’ but otherwise has Jesus saying the same thing (Mat 13:57). In this proverb itself Jesus was declaring himself to be a prophet, a prophet of God. He was in truth more than a prophet, but in their prejudice and blindness these people failed to see beyond him being the local carpenter’s son. We must be careful not to see Jesus or portray Jesus as the helpless baby in Bethlehem. The nativity is Biblical of course, but we must not base our beliefs in this story alone, as many seem to do.

The people in Jesus’ hometown marvelled at his words and his mighty works but this marvelling did not lead to belief. Tragically, they ended up in unbelief, such that Jesus ‘did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief’ (Mat 13:58); Mark has ‘could do no mighty work there’, but then says that a few sick people were healed by Jesus (6:5). Jesus usually healed and did other mighty works in response to faith, either of the individual or a friend (cf. 4:34). Where unbelief reigned any mighty works would have been attributed to Satan rather than God. And remember, Jesus was about healing people in body and soul; hard, unbelieving hearts are not moved by miracles.

The people marvelled at Jesus’ teaching while Jesus marvelled at the people’s unbelief (6:2, 6 -the Greek words are not the same). This is one of only a couple of places where Jesus is said to marvel. The other, by contrast is his marvelling at the great faith of the centurion (Luke 7:9). A foreigner with great faith contrasted with locals bound by unbelief. Do note the danger confronting us who grow up knowing all about Jesus but all too often do not know Jesus. ‘Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God’ (Heb 3:12). Note also that Jesus left Nazareth and went off to other villages. He left the people in their unbelief. Thankfully, his brothers came to believe in Jesus after he was crucified and rose from the dead (Acts 1:14). Jesus no doubt prayed for them all his days, just as you pray for your brothers and sisters to come to faith is Jesus if they have not already done so.

 **3. His own rejected him**

In light of Jesus being rejected by the people of his home town, we end with the broader fact of Jesus being rejected by his own people, by the Jewish nation. ‘He came to his own, and his own did not receive him’- so wrote John of Jesus, the Word became flesh (John 1:11). John was not referring specifically to Jesus coming to his home town, but he was with Jesus when he was rejected at Nazareth (6:1).

In the bigger picture, Jesus’ home was in the nation of Israel. God had prepared this nation by calling Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then Moses, to lead his chosen people out of Egypt and into the land he promised them, a land where no other god was to be worshipped and the covenant laws of God were to be obeyed. God sent prophets declaring his purpose for this nation, namely to send a Messiah, the anointed of God.

Messiah would be God’s own Son, the second person of the Trinity, come in the likeness of sinful flesh. This person was Jesus of Nazareth as we know, but the Jewish people, the people who heard the words of Jesus and saw his mighty works did not accept their Messiah. The people of Nazareth rejected Jesus their saviour and tried to throw him over the cliff (Luke 4:29). The broader community of his own people also rejected Jesus. They tried to stone him and eventually they crucified him. They positively rejected him by accusing him of blasphemy and calling for him to be crucified. This was a tragic day for these covenant people, although God did preserve a remnant, as we see in these verses from Mark’s gospel- ‘a few sick people’ were healed.

Have you gone along with the crowd of unbelievers, or are you part of that believing remnant? ‘As many as received Him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in his name’ (John 1:12).