

## **SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON FOR JULY 19, 2020**

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Lesson for July 19, 2020, "Wisdom that Astounds and Offends" from Mark 6:1-6, and Mark 7:1-23.

Mark recounts the story of the people in Nazareth doubting that one of them could be a prophet of God "Isn't this the carpenter?" (Mark 6:3). Although Jesus does miracles and speaks with great wisdom, because He had physically grown up among them and they in their earth-bound sense of reality cannot conceive of Him as anyone different than they, they refuse to believe in spite of the evidence. Luke echoes Mark's account of the instructions Jesus gives to His apostles, while emphasizing the authority given them by Him to cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim the Kingdom. The twelve apostles go forth and do just as Jesus commanded them, "proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere" (Luke 9:6).

Nazareth was not renowned among the cities of Israel. There is no mention of the town in the Hebrew Scriptures. We know that it is the place Joseph took his family once they returned from their exile in Egypt. We know it is the town from which Jesus' parents made their annual trip to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. And we know it is the town where "Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people" (Luke 2:52).

It is worthy to note that the pre-Pentecost sending of the twelve was prior to the Holy Spirit being sent to dwell Believers. The apostles were empowered to be extensions of the ministry of Jesus by the Holy Spirit external to them, or internal at specific times for specific purposes — as in "It is not you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:20).

Mark, the shortest of the Gospels, emphasizes Jesus' actions more than His teachings, recording eighteen of His miracles, but only one major sermon and four parables. He does not present a biography of Jesus detailing his Jewish family history. Mark does not quote the Old Testament or reference Jewish culture extensively, leading scholars to believe that he wrote primarily so that Gentile Christians would know Jesus as the son of Man and savior King who conquers everything from storms, to demons, to death.

Mark chooses to focus on the reaction of the people. They were impressed, surprised, amazed, and, astonished. That led them to question, "Where did this man get all this? What's this wisdom he's been given?" (6:2b) Very

quickly (as Mark tells it), their amazement turns to disdain, and even ridicule.

Carpenters are not known for their insight into matters of theology. Some members of the congregation may have had suspicions about the character of Mary – pregnant before she was married and now a widow. Her other children – neither her sons nor her daughters – seemed exceptional. It feels like the congregation has moved from adulation to condemnation in an instant. Indeed, Mark says “they took offense at him” – or the more literal translation, “Jesus caused them to stumble” (6:3c). *The Message* translation states: “They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.”

Jesus' replies was probably well known to them: “Prophets are honored everywhere except in their own hometowns, among their relatives, and in their own households” (6:4). This proverb acknowledges the reality of the mistreatment God’s prophets received from the people of Israel over the centuries.

Mark tells us that “Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith” (6:6). Some other translations of Jesus’ reaction include, “wondered,” “marveled,” “dumfounded,” “astonished,” and “appalled.”

It is not clear exactly how Jesus felt from the description Mark gives us, what is clear is that their rejection of Jesus and of the wisdom Jesus proclaims in their presence prevents Jesus from doing “any miracles there, except that he placed his hands on a few sick people and healed them” (6:5).

It is tempting to read Mark 6:1-6 and judge the actions of those in Jesus' hometown. How can they reject the Savior, having heard of His miracles and witnessed His wisdom and teaching? How could they be so offended by Jesus that they would not even go to Him? We realize that we should not be offended by the message (His Word), but we sometimes lash out at the messenger, (the pastor) who preaches a convicting message, the spouse who lovingly confronts, the friend who challenges or holds us accountable. We may not ask aloud "Who do you think you are?"

The disciples were sent out in pairs. Individually they could have reached more areas of the country, but this was not Christ’s plan. One advantage in going out by twos was that they could strengthen and encourage each other, especially when they faced rejection. Our strength comes from God, but he meets many of our needs through our teamwork with others. As we serve Christ, we do not need to go it alone.

The disciples were to leave at once, without extensive preparation, trusting in God's care rather than their own resources. The disciples were to stay in one house once they reached a town, to prevent bad feeling among hosts who might be embarrassed if the disciples left their home for better accommodations and it prevented the disciples from being distracted by concern for their physical comfort. Jews returning from Gentile lands would shake off pagan dust as a gesture of cleansing and contempt. When the disciples shake off the dust of an unreceptive village, they are declaring that village pagan, announcing God's judgment on that village, washing their hands of further responsibility for that village. The gesture serves as a warning to the offending village and frees the disciples to move to more fertile fields.

In chapter 7 Mark tells us that some Pharisees and some teachers of the law had come from Jerusalem, to deliberately try to find something with which to oppose Jesus. As they watched the disciples and Jesus, they saw that some did not wash their hands in the prescribed way before they ate. The Pharisees ask why they do not follow the tradition of the elders by washing before they eat. The word for "defiled," signifies that the disciples have not set themselves apart for God by making themselves ritually pure. Mark gives the reader inside information by describing the ceremonial practices of the Pharisees (verses 3-4), oral law which includes washing hands, cups, and various vessels. By this tradition, the Pharisees extend the worship of the Temple to the household. This oral law shows people how to set themselves apart for God in the midst of foreign occupation.

Scholars tell us that it was the rigid custom among the Jews to wash in this way: The hands had to be held out, palms up, hands cupped slightly, and water poured over them. Then the fist of one hand was used to scrub the other, and then the other fist would scrub the first hand. Finally the hands again were held out, with palms down, and water was poured over them a second time to cleanse away the dirty water the defiled hands had been scrubbed with. Only then would a person's hands be ceremonially clean. He might not even have been hygienically clean, but he would have been ceremonially clean. He would have been considered acceptable to God, having given strict attention to the prescribed ritual of cleansing, and thus would have been able to eat in a proper manner.

At first, Jesus does not answer the religious leaders' question. Jesus replies by using the written tradition in Scripture as the standard by which to evaluate the Pharisees' own traditions. Speaking in the manner of an Old Testament prophet who rebukes meaningless worship, Jesus quotes from Isaiah. The problem is not with human traditions per se, but with human

traditions that have come to supplant the word of God. Jesus gives a specific example of a contradiction between the Pharisaic tradition and the Law. According to tradition, once a person's property is vowed as a gift to the temple, that property cannot be released to support one's parents. Jesus says that this practice contradicts the command to honor your father and mother.

Jesus eventually responds to the question why his disciples do not wash their hands: what comes out, not what goes into people, makes them unclean (verses 14-15). He explains that true defilement has to do with what passes in and out of the heart, not the body. He lists vices that defile people, many of which match prohibitions of the Decalogue (do not steal, murder, commit adultery, or covet what is your neighbor's). The vices also have to do with mistreating other people, or failing to show love to your neighbor.

Jesus pointed out that sin actually begins in the attitudes and intentions of the inner person. Jesus did not degrade the law, but he paved the way for the change made clear, when God removed the cultural restrictions regarding food. We are pure because of outward acts, we become pure on the inside as Christ renews our minds and transforms us into his image.

Mark adds the parenthetical comment that Jesus means to declare all foods clean (verse 19). According to Leviticus 11:43-44 and 20:24-26, Yahweh "separated" the clean from the unclean food in order to distinguish the Israelites from the surrounding peoples. The Jews preserved their religious and national identity through practices associated with food laws, hand washing, and Sabbath keeping. Mark's explanation that Jesus declared all foods clean prepares the way for the Gentile mission, because the ceremonial elements that maintain a separation among groups of people.

From the section, stepping into the world, Jesus might have said, "Shake it off" to himself too. Shake the dust off your sandals as a witness when people cannot, or will not, hear what you are telling them. If they won't listen to you, if they can't offer you the decency of basic hospitality and a fair hearing, shake the dust off and keep moving. We might picture the disciples and think they only has to shake off the rejection of strangers. It's harder when we are trying to tell the truth to people who know us, especially when they have known us all our lives. It's hard to talk about something that means everything to us when the people who should understand rejects us.

That is exactly what the disciples faced and the reason Jesus gave the advice he did.

If we find ourselves rejected when we know we have good news to share, we can remember the wisdom of Jesus: Shake it off. Then take the message to the next person who needs to hear it.

**Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.**

Next week's lesson July 26, 2020, "Wisdom: The Way, Truth, and Life"

Background Scriptures Proverbs 3:17; 8:32-36; and John 14:1-14.

*Sources for this lesson: The Bible, The One Volume Bible Commentary, Word Biblical Commentary, by Robert A; Guelich, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.*