

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

*A Prophet Without Honor*

**6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? 3 Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. 4 Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 He was amazed at their lack of faith.**

In all three of the Creeds that we recite together as statements of our faith, there are references to the two states of the Son of God: the state of humiliation and the state of his exaltation. In his state of humiliation, the Scriptures describe Jesus as using his powers as God less fully, or even setting them aside for our sakes, the way a father or older brother does when he wrestles with a little child. Just how much of his power and glory did Jesus set aside for our sakes? In the end, in order to suffer for us, to remain on the cross for us, and to die for us, remaining dead for three days, in the end, he had to set all of it aside.

There were times during his ministry where Jesus showed what was coming by allowing himself to be carried along by the circumstances of the moment, such as the day when he returned home to his childhood hometown of Nazareth. Nazareth is one of the larger cities in Galilee just north of the large Esdraelon Valley and the River Kishon with Nain the nearest large city to the south, about the distance from New Ulm to Courtland, and then about 30 miles further south to Samaria, about as far as Mankato is from where you’re sitting now.

Jesus had grown up in Nazareth. After his birth in Bethlehem, they lived there for a little while until they learned that King Herod the Great was trying to kill the baby Jesus afraid of the prophecy of a King rising up from the tribe of Judah. The family fled to Egypt and lived there briefly, out of Herod’s jurisdiction. After Herod’s death, the family returned to Nazareth where Joseph took up his trade as a carpenter, the trade in which, according to verse 3, Jesus joined him in as he grew older.

Since Joseph is never mentioned in the Scriptures during Jesus’ ministry, especially here in Nazareth itself, we believe that Joseph had died by this time, leaving Jesus’ mother Mary under the care of her children. Since the Bible often mentions Jesus’ brothers in connection with his mother Mary, we also believe that these brothers (four of them are named here) and at least two sisters were the younger siblings of Jesus, born naturally to Mary and Joseph, since the Bible says that Mary and Joseph had no marital union until Jesus was born, which naturally allows for this large family of at least seven children, with Jesus at 31 being the oldest and either Simon or

one of the sisters being the youngest, probably in their teens. Sometimes people point out that “brothers” can mean “cousins” or other relatives, but this never happens when the word “brothers” is used in the same phrase as “mother.” So, we believe that the boys mentioned here as Jesus’ brothers were in fact the sons of Mary and Joseph, coming along after the birth of the Savior, after Mary was no longer a virgin, but a wife.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth, he did two things. He preached the gospel, and then he performed just a very few healing miracles. But the Nazarenes had heard about him; they already knew about his preaching fame and about his reputation for doing miracles. Yet they were amazed.

There are two kinds of amazement in this account. Mark tells us that they were “struck with wonder.” Overwhelmed. They asked six questions in rapid succession:

In general: (1) Where’d he get these things?

About the preaching: (2) What is this wisdom he’s been given?

About the miracles: (3) What are these remarkable miracles he’s performing?

And about his roots: (4) Isn’t this our village carpenter? (5) Isn’t he Mary’s son and the brother of these four young men? (6) Aren’t these his sisters?

Now, Moses had run into this problem with his tribe and family, but a people’s familiarity with a prophet does not change the character of the prophet. Or his message. But Nazareth’s excuse for their unbelief was that because they knew him when he was younger and his family, that somehow that made his message invalid? Or questionable?

There are many excuses for turning away from the Gospel. Beware of the appeal of the exotic, or the foreign, or the mysterious. This is what leads people into all sorts of pathways that seem interesting, but they don’t lead to Christ and they certainly don’t lead to the forgiveness of sins or to heaven; only to hell.

There is also a danger in certain Christian circles to dismiss the Divine Nature of Jesus Christ. These are theologians who want Jesus to be thought of as a good example and an excellent speaker, but not Divine; not truly God. They pooh-pooh the idea of the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus. That’s one reason why they shy away from saying the Creeds in worship. They reduce the resurrection as a way of thinking about someone and carrying on with their legacy after they’ve died. And the more that such critics dismiss the Divine nature of Christ, the more unaccountable his preaching and his miracles become. It is as if these critics believe as if they live in Nazareth.

All of these errors show that **unbelief is a choice of the human will**. And this brings us to the second “amazement” in our text. Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. It wasn’t that he was surprised, but his amazement was really **disappointment**. How could you? Just as they remembered him, he remembered them. He had known their faith when they were younger. He had gone to synagogue every week with them, learned with them, worshiped, sang hymns and psalms, learned doctrine with them, memorized passages with them.

They all had booed together when the Book of Esther was read and Haman, the last Amalekite, appeared as the villain. They cheered together at the victories of Daniel and his friends, and David with his slingshot, and Ehud, the Left-handed Judge!

They learned the Law of Moses and they learned about the promises of the coming Savior.

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses says that God would send a prophet “from among your brothers.” When they read Moses, they probably understood “brothers” in two ways, and both would be correct. The Messiah would be a “brother Israelite, and a brother Jew.” This kind of brother would be a countryman, and everyone in Israel thought this way.

But another meaning of “brother” would be someone who shares the same faith. The Savior, naturally, would be a fellow believer, one who was necessarily also a teacher, a teacher of correct doctrine and theology.

But “brother” has another sense; especially here in Nazareth. “Brother” can also be a male sibling. And it wasn’t Jesus, but the Nazarenes, who pointed out that his brothers lived there with them. Sometimes it pleases God to seem to use figurative language when he says and means a thing that can also be taken in a literal way, and this is the best example in Nazareth. God raised up his Messiah from among his physical brothers.

There is a verse early in 1 Samuel that I’m very fond of. The last verse of 1 Samuel chapter 3 says that the Lord revealed himself to the prophet Samuel “though his word.” It’s what they should have paid attention to. That’s how the Lord reveals himself to us, today.

Jesus’ response to this amazingly disappointing unbelief in Nazareth was to still reach out with the means of grace. He still preached there. He even performed a few miracles; He saved some even when most rejected him. Like Lot rescued from the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. Like Noah rescued from the total destruction of the inhabited earth. When you seem to be surrounded by doubt or skepticism or unbelief, even hostile unbelief, always remember that God knows you. He know your faith. The power of the gospel is to save, even when few believe; even when many or even most reject. It is the power of the Gospel to change hearts; as Psalm 107 says, the Gospel saves from the grave.

There may have been times in your life when you became doubtful of the Lord. It happens to almost everyone. Too often it happens, not when we’re in distress or in a time of crisis, but when everything seems ordinary; when we’ve just been away from the Word for a while. That’s a crisis we don’t recognize; a ship that’s filling slowly with water, a habit we don’t think is going to get the better of us when in fact it’s already doing damage.

But there comes the grace of God, like Jesus going to Nazareth. He knew what was going to happen. He knew most of them would reject him. But he came anyway, to rescue a few. And he knows that we need his forgiveness. He has already given it! Listen to his Word. Take what he offers. Trust what he has promised. He is no mere example. He IS the power of the Gospel. He is the Son of God, the Savior. Your Savior. Amen.