

CLOSING HIS MINISTRY IN GALILEE

Mark 6:1-13

The first period of the public ministry of our Lord closed with the plot formed against His life by the Pharisees and Herodians and His temporary withdrawal from Capernaum. The second period ends with His rejection by His own townsmen at Nazareth. Both periods were marked by a great popularity among the people, which throws into more bold relief the hatred of the rulers and the jealous unbelief of former associates and friends in the town where He had been reared. The contrast of His experience in Nazareth with that which He found elsewhere is even further heightened by the fact that He had just completed a series of astounding miracles: calming a storm, healing a demoniac, conquering incurable disease, and raising the dead. Such works resulted in an imperfect but almost universal faith in Christ, so that multitudes were healed by Him; but when He returned to Nazareth He found such unbelief that "He could there do no mighty work."

During the interval between His first and second visits His fame had grown, and His power had been yet more wonderfully manifested. Once before, at the very beginning of His ministry, Christ had been rejected by them who knew Him best and had been compelled to flee from Nazareth; but now, with His fame established, with His teachings widely accepted, with the wonder of His miracles on most lips, He returned to the little town which for thirty years had been His home, and which He loved devotedly. His disciples followed Him. That is what disciples are supposed to do. Are you a follower who does not follow? Are you a lover who does not love? Are you a soldier who does not fight? Labels are to indicate what is in the bottle. Names should stand for natures. Be a following follower.

Returning to Nazareth, Christ, as His custom was, observed the Sabbath by going into the synagogue. Doubtless He entered that synagogue hundreds and hundreds of times during His thirty years' residence in Nazareth. In the synagogue He began to teach. How profound was His teaching! But, how shallow were the people! They were struck with amazement at what the Preacher said. It is to their credit that they listened, which is more than many do who go to church. Unfortunately the people expressed astonishment at His wisdom, and wondered how He got such knowledge and how He was able to perform such mighty works. They were not interested in His sayings or His deeds. They were chiefly concerned to convince one another that his ministry did not merit consideration because He was their former carpenter, the son of their townswoman and brother of their friends. Four things puzzled them: the source of Christ's knowledge, the character of His wisdom, the significance of His power and the majesty of His person. They were attempting to reconcile that which was immediate with that which they knew of Him before this time. They were in His presence, facing what they had heard from Him, what they had seen Him do and what they had heard that He had been doing. Then they thinking of Him as they had known Him during those years in which He had lived among them. They knew that He was the son of Mary. They knew His brothers, and sisters. They knew that He had been reared in a very ordinary family. As His neighbors, they recognized His wisdom and recalled the fact of His miracles, but they denied His claims, refused His message and declined His proffered healing. His wisdom was patent and His works were evident. How then did He get this wisdom? How did He do these works? They said in effect, "The wisdom He utters and the works He does are not His own." They simply could not believe that the young man who had grown up in their own community, in the home of Joseph the carpenter and his wife Mary, could have the authority and the miraculous power that were attributed to Him.

The message of this sad scene is summarized by a statement of our Lord which He used on three different occasions and which has since become proverbial: "A prophet is not with-

out honor, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." First of all, a prophet is without honor in his own country because he is so well known. This reminds us of the statement, "Familiarity breeds contempt." The fact that familiarity with Christ caused men to reject Him is a sad commentary on human nature. His companions argued that if He were really the Messiah, and possessed such divine powers as were reported it would have been manifest earlier in His life when He was still living in their midst. It is hard for people to believe in the surpassing greatness of one who has been regarded as their equal during his boyhood and early manhood. Jealousy and prejudice blind their eyes. Because they were envious, they were not willing to acknowledge the superiority over themselves of one of their own number. A second reason why "a prophet is not without honor, save in his own country" is found in the false standards of judgments by which we estimate greatness. The men of Nazareth were expecting a Messiah who would appear with regal display and kingly power; they could not accept as their Messiah a "carpenter." Yet that "carpenter" had demonstrated His power and authenticated His claims. Their prejudice as to what a Messiah should be kept them from honoring the true Messiah when He appeared. So, today, false standards of greatness and worth blind us to the real merits and loveliness of those in our midst. The Nazarenes did not see how a carpenter could be a prophet. But why not? All the prophets are not in the colleges, and all who are in the colleges are not prophets. It is not one's surroundings which determine his character. Fancy taking your theology from a carpenter! Fancy getting any good from some one who lives on your own street, and whose relatives you know! Enchantment comes from afar, and what is foreign is considered to be worthy.

The chief reason why a prophet is without honor in his own country is that he is really unknown. Christ was not rejected at Nazareth because He was so well known, but because men thought they knew Him, while actually they were most ignorant of His real person and mission. They judged by mere externals: they knew His mother, His brothers, His sisters, His carpenter shop; but they did not really know Him. Had they known Him they would have loved Him.

Listen to these men of Nazareth and notice how their criticism classified them. They declared that Christ was one of them, therefore He was incapable of being an instrument of good. Had they stopped to think they would have realized that their criticism of Christ was a condemnation of themselves. In substance they said, "This man, who has worked by our sides, cannot teach us anything." Why not? Because He is one of us.

The real pathos of the story is expressed in the words which follow the proverb: "He could there do no mighty work." This is the pity of it all. Where appreciation and love are lacking there our friends cannot be, and there we cannot do what otherwise would be possible; where faith is lacking, there Christ will not do any mighty work. What was it that Christ could not do any mighty work there? Because God was excluded from their desires and motives. As a result they were degraded. When the light of His wisdom and works flashed upon them, they loved the darkness and hurried back into it. They simply refused the light.

Christ marvelled because of their unbelief, but He did not remain among them. He left them, never to return. Yet mark the discrimination of His grace. There were a few sick folk, whose longing eyes were fixed upon Him, and from whose hearts there came to Him an appeal, and He healed them. Where there were weak hearts trembling toward Him, He laid His hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. "He went round about the villages teaching." Other places would welcome Him, other souls would be saved, but not those who had known Him longest, not those who foolishly imagined that they knew Him best.

Each period of our Lord's ministry in Galilee was marked by a wide popularity among the people but also by a contrasted hatred and unbelief. Christ saw the multitudes who wished

to receive His message and His healing. He also was conscious of the rising opposition which soon would end His brief ministry. Therefore, when He had been rejected by His fellow townsmen in Nazareth, He sent forth His twelve apostles for the purpose of extending His work. He sent them forth as His representatives to say the things He had been saying and to do the things which He had been doing. He thereby enlarged the sphere and scope of His own ministry by calling them to share in it. He had been laboring under limited conditions, so in order that more of the villages might be reached and more people hear the gospel, He sent out the twelve.

Christ sent forth the apostles in pairs, for thus they could cover more territory than by going in a company. Also, the individual worker would be cheered and helped in his work and his testimony would be strengthened and confirmed. In this mission of the twelve we may discern intimations of principles which apply to missionary service in all lands and in every age. There should neither be congestion nor isolation. Power and effectiveness are increased by companionship and counsel and cooperation.

The apostles were commissioned to work miracles of healing and to preach. "He gave them authority over unclean spirits." Their ministries of healing and of helpfulness would manifest the spirit of Christ, open the way for the gospel message and confirm it in the minds of the people.

What do we know of their work? No place is indicated, no journey is described, no discourse is recorded, no interesting incident is recounted. Mark tells us that the burden of their preaching was that men should repent. They so preached that men did repent of their sins toward God. They also anointed with oil some who were sick. They used oil as a medicine. Oil was also a symbol of the Holy Spirit and reminds us of the spiritual healing which ever accompanies the preaching of repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.