

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

In Mark 6:1-6 we are told Jesus' reputation for attracting large crowds, preaching words of wisdom, and performing miraculous acts of healing had preceded Him to His hometown of Nazareth. The whole town had plenty of opportunity to hear what Jesus was doing elsewhere. They began to discuss among themselves that Jesus was merely a hometown boy--one of them. And they decided that He was certainly no better than anyone else in town. They were not prepared to accept the conclusion that He was a prophet or even a rabbi, much less God's long-awaited, promised Messiah. When Jesus talked to them, He spoke of spiritual things such as one's relationship with God and the necessity of repentance that would bring about God's Kingdom in a converted heart. To them, Jesus was little more than an upstart. So the people closed their hearts to the possibility that the Spirit could be leading them to a new and wonderful discovery of God in their very midst.

The Gospel shows us the grave dangers of closing our hearts to the possibility of God's presence. Like the Nazarenes, we too often measure success by power, victory, or social status. In many ways, we too insulate ourselves from the gift of God's spirit of grace. Isn't what we want from Jesus very similar to what the Nazarenes wanted? Jesus was crucified not because he was God but because he claimed to be God but failed to live up to the Jewish nation's expectations. It's not that the Jews weren't looking for the Messiah; it's just that Jesus wasn't what they were looking for. Their and, too often, our kind of Messiah would come down from a cross. He wouldn't do a stupid thing like rising from the dead. He would do a smart thing like never dying.

The fateful consequences for unbelief are clear. Jesus "was not able to perform any mighty deed there, apart from curing a few sick people by laying His hands on them." Eyes of faith enable people to recognize the direct intervention of God in our lives. Because of Nazareth's unbelief, their refusal to admit faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Nazarenes shut themselves off from the possibility of experiencing miracles in their

midst. It was not that Jesus wasn't able to work signs and wonders. But a faith response in Jesus as Lord and Savior is required for such miracles. Otherwise, the Nazareth would have thought of Jesus merely as a magician.

The Church is the body of Christ, His own people for whom He suffered and died to redeem. But we limit Him when we refuse to admit the possibility that He is working in our midst by the power of the Holy Spirit, bestowing new life in us that can make a difference in the lives of others in our community. We limit Him when we no longer expect to experience His miracles in our lives or refuse to see them in the lives of others.

The Nazarenes had a choice. They made their choice by rejecting Jesus. We also have a choice to make. We can open our hearts and selves to the possibilities of Christ's presence in us, or we can shut Him out and forfeit His blessings.

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