

July 15

"It came to pass, that when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence. And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house. And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." — Matthew 13:53-58

His own country here means, not Bethlehem, where he was born, but Nazareth, where he had been brought up. It was a poor and despised place, so that it was proverbially asked, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Yet there was he found, who is the King of glory.

Here he taught in their synagogues. What he taught is not recorded. But we may determine the substance of it from his addresses on other occasions, and from the end which he always kept in view, "to seek and to save that which was lost." Of his manner of teaching, we cannot form an adequate conception. It was all his own. "Grace was poured into his lips." Even those who derived no saving advantage from it, even his enemies, said, "Never man spake like this man."

Accordingly, the people were astonished. Wonder has its place in religion, and there is every thing in the Gospel to call it forth. Yet many emotions of this kind are not powerful enough to produce any decisive result and the subjects of them behold, and wonder, and perish. Thus it was here. They acknowledge his works to be mighty works; that is, miraculous; but are offended with his want of education, having been at no university, at the feet of no Gamaliel, never having learned letters. And also because he was not a man of birth and rank, but had relations in common life, and was himself engaged in manual employment. See how the god of this world blinds the minds of them that believe not. Who can stand before envy and prejudice? If he had the wisdom, and did the works, both of which they admitted, surely it was the more commendable, and the more marvellous, that he was so pre-eminent without any ordinary helps, and the more likely was he to be divinely inspired. There seemed no other way of accounting for the prodigy. And this seems to strike them. But men do not value things according to their real excellence. And when there is not a cordial liking to any subject, every circumstance, which would otherwise befriend, is converted into objection.

In answer to their offence, our Saviour remarks, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and in his own house." Usefulness depends upon acceptance, and acceptance upon esteem. Hence a bishop is to have a good report of them that are without; and hearers are commanded not only to receive such, but to hold them in reputation. Those who have been above a man in condition, do not like to come down and listen to him as an instructor and reprove; and those who have been his equals have been too familiar with him to feel veneration towards him. Many things, though quite consistent with sanctity, yet breed not that reverence and respect which attach to a man that comes to us, so to speak, from a kind of distance, and is only seen through the medium of his sacred office. The case, here stated, is not universally and absolutely true; but it is so generally and comparatively, and even our Saviour himself was not an exception to it. After this, some of his servants need not be astonished at the treatment they experience. Neither should they fret and complain. They must take human nature as it is, and accommodate themselves, as much as they can, prudently and innocently, to the actual state of society. This governed the Master; and he assigns it as the reason why he preferred labouring elsewhere: "He said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself: whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country. And he said, Verily, I say unto you, No prophet is accepted in his own country."

What a conclusion is here! "And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief." Some he did. Mark says, he laid his hands on a few sick folk, and healed them. But what was the prevention of more? He generally required faith in his miraculous exertions. Hence the expressions, Be it unto thee according to thy faith, Believest thou that I am able to do this? If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. There were, indeed, some cases in which he wrought without this, at least without the faith of the individual himself, though even then, faith was found in those who applied on his behalf, or who brought him to Jesus.

But faith is always necessary in spiritual operations. He can produce faith within us, but he cannot carry on his works of grace without it. If he could, it would be in contradiction to his word, and by a blind, positive, physical force, without our knowledge, feeling, wishes, or designs. But this is not his way. He does every thing by faith. We are saved through faith. Hence the importance of believing. The first, the chief concern is, to get faith. Talk not of the sufficiency and excellency of the remedy, it cannot heal us unless it be applied; and it can only be applied by faith. The Gospel is the power of God to salvation, but it is only to every one that believeth.

There is something infinitely evil in unbelief, if we only consider what it prevents. It stands, and it is the only thing that does stand, between a sinner and the relief of the Gospel. Let him believe, and he is saved. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that believeth, hath the Son. As to others, the wrath of God abideth on them, for nothing else can withdraw them from under it. The Jews could not enter into Canaan, because of their unbelief. It equally bars heaven against us.

But what mighty works attend faith! By faith we are justified. By faith we are sanctified. We stand, we walk, we live, we conquer by faith.

And what an injurious bar to a Christian himself is unbelief. How much does it hinder him from achieving in a way of duty, and realizing in a way of privilege. What keeps him so weak and wavering? Unbelief. "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." If we depend on our frames and feelings, we draw from a summer brook, instead of the well of living waters. Pleasing experiences are cordials, but faith furnishes the soul's food. Faith in the promises would immediately tranquillize us, as it did Paul in the storm: "Be of good cheer; for I believe God, that it shall be as it was told me." What keeps a Christian so poor in consolation? Unbelief. "Filled with all joy and peace in believing." "Believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

Who would not, then, by faith, let loose all the sources of Divine mercy and grace?

Who would not cry out, with tears, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief?"

Morning Exercises For Everyday In The Year
By Rev. William Jay