

7. The unbelief that rejects God

2/5/2006

Today is the Super Bowl Sunday. One of the biggest events in the United States and a single most watched event on TV that any advertiser would love to be on if they can afford. It seems like many people are interested in watching Super Bowl commercials as much as the game itself.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with enjoying a good football game, but I had to wonder how many people in that stadium and around the country would drop just about everything including God who created heaven and earth and even their own lives to watch this Super Bowl. Would those people cheer for God when He call on their names or would they be embarrassed because they rejected Him in the past?

Evolutionist Charles Darwin said that belief was "the most complete of all distinctions between man and the lower animals." If this observation is true, it suggests that lack of faith on man's part puts him on the same level as the animals.

This morning we are going to look at the people who reject our Lord Jesus because of their unbelief. I find at least four types of people who reject Jesus.

A. THE UNBELIEF OF HIS HOMETOWN NEIGHBORS

Mark 6:1-6 Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. 2 And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, "Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! 3 Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him. 4 But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." 5 Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. 6 And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

Jesus returned to Nazareth where a year before He had been rejected by the people and evicted from the synagogue according to Luke 4. It was certainly an act of grace on His part to give the people another chance to hear His Word, believe and be saved. Yet their hearts were still hard. This time, they did not evict Him. They simply did not take Him seriously.

Two things astonished these people: His mighty miracles and His wonderful wisdom.

What was their problem? Why were they unable to trust Him and experience the wonders of His power and grace as others had? They thought that they really knew Him. After all, He had been their neighbors for nearly thirty years, they had seen Him at work in the carpenter's shop, and He appeared to be just another Nazarene. Probably they still had tables He made for them in their houses.

Familiarity breeds contempt, only with contemptible things or among contemptible people. The contempt shown by the Nazarenes said nothing about Jesus Christ, but it said a great deal about them!

Jesus' power was not depend on individual people's faith, but receiving His blessings is largely depend on each person's faith. Unbelief insulates and isolates the power of God from us. It still does that today!

B. THE DISCIPLES' ON-THE-JOB-TRAINING

Mark 6:7-13 And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. 8 He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts-- 9 but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. 10 Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. 11 And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" 12 So they went out and preached that people should repent. 13 And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. When the Lord originally called the 12 Apostles, His purpose was to teach and train them so that they might assist Him and eventually be able to take His place when He returned to the Father. Before sending them out, He reaffirmed their authority to heal and to cast out demons and He gave them some pointed instructions.

Their job as preachers wasn't to change people's minds. They were to persuasively present the message. But if their audience didn't receive it, they didn't receive it and they could leave, and shake the very dust from their feet as they left.

That still applies here today. I know that some of you are not born-again Christian. I will explain to you about the only way of salvation through Jesus Christ at the end of this service. If you don't receive Jesus into your hearts, it is not my problem, but it becomes your very own problem that you will have to explain to God why you have rejected Him today.

According to v11, we find out that there will be different level of judgement in the day of Judgement. Of course, there won't be any of beer drinking buddies with tailgating parties and having good times in hell.

C. THE UNBELIEF OF HIS ENEMIES

Mark 6:14-20 Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." 16 But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. 18 For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; 20 for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.

The reports of Christ's ministry even reached into the palace of Herod Antipas. Mark called Him "King," which is what Herod wanted to be called. But in reality, godless Herod was only a tetrarch, the ruler of a fourth part of the nation. When Herod the Great died, the Romans divided his territory among his three sons and Antipas was made tetrarch of Perea and Galilee.

Herod Antipas had married the daughter of King Aretas IV and then had divorced her so he could marry Herodias, the wife of his half brother, Herod Philip.

Actually, Emperor Augustus denied the title "king" to Herod. Demanded by the ambitious Herodias, Herod pressed for the title again and again until he so offended the Emperor Caligula that he was dismissed as a traitor. Then his brother Agrippa accused him of treason against Rome. Later, he was banished into the distant Roman province of Gaul, where Herod and Herodias committed suicide.

It was a wicked marriage that was contrary to the Law of Moses, and the fearless John the Baptist had denounced the king for his sins. Herod feared John, privately listened to his preaching. However, Herodias, on the other hand, hated John, wanted to kill him, and patiently waited for the most convenient time. In their evil character and lawless deeds, these two remind me of Ahab and Jezebel from 1 Kings 18.

Mark 6:21-29 Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. 22 And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." 23 He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." 24 So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" 25 Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." 26 And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. 27 Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and beheaded him in prison, 28 brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. 29 When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

The Jews would not have permitted a woman to dance before a group of men, and even most Gentile mothers would have forbidden a daughter to do what the daughter of Herodias did. History informs us that the girl's name was Salome. But the girl was a part of the mother's plan to get rid of John the Baptist, and Salome played her part well.

Herodias knew her husband would be nothing more than a lustful dirty old man toward his step-daughter and she also knew that he would boast about his power in front of his guests. Her plan worked just as she expected.

Herod Antipas would represent the type of people who is glad to hang around with Christian stuff, but not really follow the Lord, nor they would obey God's commands. They would eventually reject and stand against God because of the popularity's sake from the people around them.

Are we willing to compromise the standards of the Bible for the sake of the acceptance of the non-believers around us? Do we have 'Herodias' that blocks our decisions to follow Jesus wholeheartedly in our hearts? If we do, we must get rid of it at any cost.

Herodias represents a group of people who are actually hostile to the Word of God and everything about God.

I am sure that you have heard about Herod Antipas and wicked Herodias before. But I don't believe that you have had an opportunity to see what she looked like until now. I have a special source who provided me a photo of Herodias. Here is her photo.

D. THE UNBELIEF OF HIS OWN DISCIPLES

1) They needed rest, but so much for that

Mark 6:30-34 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. 31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat. 32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. 33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him. 34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

As Jesus chose to rest with His disciples after a hard day of work, we need to rest from God's work time to time. As someone said, "If you don't come apart and rest, you will come apart."

But their plan went out the window as the people showed up for Jesus. The disciples often saw the crowds as work, and as constant demands, especially at a time like this when their well-deserved rest was interrupted by the multitude. But Jesus saw them and was moved with compassion. Each face reflected a need, a hunger, or a hurt. Jesus cared more about the needs of someone else than His own needs.

As a faithful Shepherd, Jesus takes care of the most pressing need for these sheep – He feeds them with the Word of God.

2) Feeding Five thousand

Mark 6:35-44 35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. 36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat." 37 But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?" 38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish." 39 Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. 41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all. 42 So they all ate and were filled. 43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish. 44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

As far as the disciples were concerned, the multitude were in the wrong place at the wrong time, and nothing could be done for their meal. With that kind of approach, they would have made ideal committee members. Someone has defined a committee as a group of people who individually can do nothing and collectively decide that nothing can be done.

Acting on the basis of human wisdom, His disciples saw the problem but not the potential. But Jesus looked at the situation, not as a problem, but as an opportunity to trust the Father and glorify His name.

How many times God's people have complained, "If we only had enough money, we could do something!" The first step is not to measure what we have, but to determine God's will and trust Him to meet the need.

V39 reminds another verse from the Book of Psalm:

Psalm 23:1-2 The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures

As we all have read, the result was stunning. The miracle took place in His hands, not in theirs. Whatever we give to Him, He can bless and multiply. We are not manufacturers. We are only distributors. Everybody had enough fish and chips and twelve baskets were left over to remind the twelve disciples about God's faithfulness.

3) Another miracle of stopping a storm

Mark 6:45-52 Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. 46 And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. 47 Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. 48 Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them. Now about the fourth watch of the night He came to them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them by. 49 And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost, and cried out; 50 for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid." 51 Then He went up into the boat to them, and the wind ceased. And they were greatly amazed in themselves beyond measure, and marveled. 52 For they had not understood about the loaves, because their heart was hardened.

Why did Jesus compel His disciples to leave? He wanted to teach them another lesson on faith that would help prepare them for the work that lay ahead of them after He was gone.

The disciples had just completed a very successful mission, healing the sick and preaching the Gospel. They had shared in the miraculous feeding of 5,000 people. They were on a "spiritual high" and this in itself was dangerous. It is good to be on the mountaintop if you don't get careless and step off a cliff.

In the Book of Acts 4, it is interesting to note that the "storm" of official persecution began after the disciples had won 5,000 people to Christ. Each new experience of testing demands of us more faith and courage.

In that first storm experience, the disciples had Jesus in the boat with them. But this time, He was on the mountain praying for them. He was teaching them to live by faith. It is same for us. I don't know where you are today or what position you are in. You may be in between the rock and hard place right now. You may be sitting alone in a dark corner surrounded by raging enemies. You may be facing temptations and problems that seem too great to bear. You may find yourself out on a stormy sea and you feel as if your little boat is about to go down. But remember this: Jesus is interceding for us from heaven. When the hour seems the darkest, He will come to us and we will reach to a safe harbor!

Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths.

E. MORE MIRACLES BY JESUS TO THOSE WHO TRUST IN HIM

Mark 6:53-56 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, 55 ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. 56 Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

The chapter 6 starts and ends with contrast. At His own hometown, He was rejected, yet when He was arrived at Gennesaret, He was welcomed.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) God may work with no belief, but not with unbelief.

God doesn't have a problem when a seeker has a doubt. He would meet that seeker at his level. But when a scoffer demands proof from God, he will hear nothing but dead silence from heaven.

2) The first step is not to measure our resources, but to determine God's will and trust Him to meet the need.

Instead of looking at the difficult situation as a road block, we need to see it as a great opportunity to trust our Lord.

3) If we trust Him, we will always have sufficiency and security, no matter what the situation might be. The important thing is that we trust Him.