

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a Bishop and Pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument -- but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, I would see Jesus.”

JESUS GOES HOME FOR THE SABBATH

Gospel – Mark 6

Jesus left there and went to his hometown. His disciples followed him. ²When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were amazed. They asked, “Where did this man learn these things? What is this wisdom that has been given to this man? How is it that miracles such as these are performed by his hands? ³Isn’t this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

⁴Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own house.” ⁵He could not do any miracles there except to lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶He was amazed at their unbelief. Then he went around the villages teaching



In his preface to his very famous work, *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman said, “The proof of a poet is that his country absorbs him as affectionately as he has absorbed it.” Walt Whitman was one of America’s most influential poets, and was called the “Bard of Democracy.” I don’t exactly know what he meant, but I think it’s something like an idea that *poets reach their level of success as they are embraced by their people*. The more people embrace the poets, the more successful they are.

Prophets are a different story. It’s so different from prophets than it is for poets that Jesus makes His own poetry -- or at least prosaic -- phrase, “**A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own house.**” There is no honor. There is no accolade. There is no parade. There is affection or absorption. There were no pats on the back or clapping of hands for the homecoming of Jesus.

How much more if Jesus had come in with a sign on His front bumper that yes, He was the Son of God. *Gods are an entirely different level of success*. People in those days expected gods to be limited to their city borders; in charge of one or two kinds of natural disaster; able to do a few heroic actions; if only that city deity or hometown god were on their side.

How different that is from this Jesus of Nazareth. He was unlimited by borders; in charge of the wind, waves, and sicknesses, even death; able to save from short and long-distances. Jesus of Nazareth is unlimited. We are told He has the omnies, omniscient, omnipresent, omnipotent, meaning all-knowing, all-powerful, and existing everywhere. Jesus had the timelessness of eternity and the reliability of truth and the all-compassionate affection of love. *Our God can make us dizzy if we consider His very Being ...* but no one in Jesus’ hometown expected ...

THE LIMITATIONS OF AN UNLIMITED GOD

1. His teachings get too close

You were expecting the carpenter? It was Nazareth, a backwoodsy, don't-blink-or-you'll-miss-it, flyover burgh in the sticks. It was the place where Jesus grew up. It was where He watched His father hammer together furniture. It was where the family grew up. Nazareth was where young Jesus watched the fireworks on the fourth of July ... not really, but you get the idea. Jesus apparently drew little attention to Himself growing up. Over and over again, His time had not yet come. But today was the Sabbath, and Jesus had begun His ministry. He had picked out His disciples, and now they followed Him into the synagogue. And He was using their Old Testament Scriptures. His neighbors growing up were expecting someone a little rougher around these edges, someone ... a little more limited. Or should we say a little less unlimited in wisdom and power? You were expecting the carpenter? How about the Builder of the cosmos and the Maker of the universe, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last? So close was this wisdom and power! **Too** close.

Who were these brothers and sisters they bring up? The neighbors point out that they knew the Savior's brothers and sisters, people like Jude and James, who go on to write books in the Bible. Generally now we have swung back into the thinking that these were Jesus' step-brothers by blood. Some believe they were cousins, since the word is used for cousins in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It doesn't really matter. The point is that familiarity breeds contempt, and these neighbors and friends of Jesus were just too familiar. How could Jesus have wisdom? How could Jesus perform such mighty wonders? They have a real problem with this. They were just too close, just too familiar with Jesus.

The problem wasn't so much acknowledging the wisdom of Jesus, but from where it might have come. They don't doubt that Jesus is learned and powerful, wise and mighty. They're not treating Him like the village fool; a traveling snake oil trader; or a birthday party magician. To these people, Jesus' origins should show that He wasn't true God. It must show that He was a man. So what they really revealed was that true God was getting too close for comfort, too familiar for their tastes.

We must understand how close these teachings get to the heart, to the sinner, and to the soul. We learn from Luke that Jesus was teaching His personal fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies. His theme was, **"Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."** Today they were to know God's power was right next door. Today God's power was in Nazareth, a backwoodsy, don't-blink-or-you'll-miss-it, flyover burgh in the sticks. Today a holy God wanted to get near and share His perfect gifts and offer His unfailing love. He was there to bind them up and fix their hearts. But that suggests to the heart, to the sinner, and to the soul that there is a problem. When the God of no-limits gets near, the sinner's nature is to sense discomfort and to turn the other direction. Where a handful of people might listen, droves of others might be conflicted and expect something better than who God is and how he wants to be close to us in our everyday lives.

A mostly untrue lie we must unlearn is the notion that there are Christian family units and unchristian ones, Christian nations and unchristian ones. Life is not always so cut-and-dried or so black-and-white. Even Jesus' own hometown, the very place He hailed from, His America, gave Him an ugly welcome home. Why would it be any different these days? Each nation has multiple faiths. Each family wrestles with individual thinking. Each soul is responsible for his or her own doubts. So while we might seek to control the thinking of those around us, God asks each of us today: *How close am I to you? How close can I get? Will you invite Me into your problems? Will you seek My counsel when you're confused? Will you love Me when you meet times of joy? Will you call on Me in the day of trouble? Will you honor and thank Me when you are delivered?*" If ours is a truly unlimited God, are you looking for help somewhere else? Are you looking for sin and unbelief to bind up your broken heart? Are you looking for the little bandages of the world to soothe its weight on your shoulders? Are you wondering why God hasn't helped when you've kept Him far off?

The Word of God is never so richly despised as where it is so richly taught. Those who do not have it do not want it; and those who have it despise it. The people of Nazareth bear that out. There was the King of kings, and they wanted the carpenter of Main Street. Here was the Lord of lords, and they wanted to see him flinch. There was the Great Physician, and they wanted to examine His high school diploma. “So simplistic is His water for an infant,” they say; meanwhile a baby was just reborn in God. How close Jesus has been to us, without limits.

If the teachings of Jesus seem to just get too close ...

2. His goodness goes too far

“Jesus” and “can’t” don’t seem to belong in the same sentence. We’ve already referenced His limitless attributes. Jesus can do anything. Yet in this part of the Bible we are told “**Jesus could not do any miracles there**” except heal a few slight fevers and sniffles. I get dizzy thinking about this. Jesus can do anything, yet among these people he could not do something. It would all collapse into nonsense unless we understand God’s patience. He “**is patient with us, not wanting any to perish, but everyone to come to repentance**” (1 Peter 3:9). If a patient God has patience unlimited, He will not make machines or robots out of people. He will not administer mind-control and force His Spirit into them. Never mind whether “Jesus” and “can’t” belong in the same sentence ...

Do “Jesus” and “I” belong in the same sentence? Not if I am like these people from Nazareth, who have had Jesus since way-back-when. Jesus can’t do anything with me either if I concentrate more on His measuring up to me than I concentrate on repenting of my sins. Maybe I concentrate more on the failings of others I knew from way-back-when than I do on myself and my own failings. The beauty of that is how Jesus in His goodness puts a sinner like me in the same sentence as Himself, in the same plan of the Father, and goes so far on my behalf.

At what point does God’s goodness satisfy us in this life? We may try so hard to embrace God’s blessings that we forget about the One who has blessed us. We may have tried so hard to appease God’s blessings as if they were God Himself. The excuses for actually spending time with God who is too good to us are legion: In the summer the weather is too warm for God; in the winter it is too cold for Him; sometimes the roads are cracked; sometimes we’re running late; sometimes we don’t want to see the visitors; sometimes there is a headache; sometimes the sermons are too long; sometimes the sermons are too short; sometimes the pastor isn’t likeable, and so on to infinity. But God is so good that we are comfortable to test His patience, even when He says meeting Him here is for our encouragement and comfort.

Where there is no faith, God withholds blessings. People become so secure that they need no miracles from God. **Jesus came to His own, and His own did not receive Him** (John 1:11). **They will turn their ears away from the truth and seek after myths** (2 Tim. 4:4). **A person’s enemies will be those of his own household** (Matt. 10:36). That’s what happened to these people, and it was amazing to our unlimited Son of God.

There is also power in God’s withholding of blessings. The Nazarenes proved they needed God’s Law. They demonstrated they needed tough love. If it’s true that you don’t know what you’ve got until it’s gone, who knows how influential it was for Jesus to simply not perform great wonders and move on from His hometown? If it’s true that silence speaks volumes, maybe some of these Nazarenes still had a chance at faith, to break through the limitations of unbelief and trust in our unlimited Jesus. It’s true that the faith of one or two others in Jesus’ ministry amazed Him ... in a good way.

How shall we amaze Jesus – with honor or unbelief? Once upon a time in Kentucky, there was a rich landowner. He had a slave named Huff. Frequently, the landowner saw that Huff in the evening would go behind his hut, kneel down, and with folded hands lift his eyes to heaven. The master said, “Huff,

upon my plantation I allow no praying. I cannot endure it and you must stop." "I cannot," said Huff. "But you must." "I cannot, master." "Very well. If you can't, I will have you hung up and have you receive twenty-five lashes every morning and evening till you can." "Huff cannot stop praying, master," said Huff. He was therefore tied to the pole and was given twenty-five lashes so that the blood flowed from Huff's back. After he had received these strokes, he went his way rejoicing. When the master came into the house his wife said that he should let Huff alone. If he cannot stop praying, that will not hurt her husband! But he said he could not bear to see or hear anyone pray and it shall not be permitted on his plantation. But the master was greatly troubled now and when he retired, he could not sleep. About midnight he woke his wife and asked her to pray for him. To pray! For *him!* But she said, "I cannot! I've never prayed before in my life." His anguish became greater, and he miserably groaned out whether she did not know anyone in the house who could pray. "No one," said she, "but Huff." Huff was sent for, and his master then said, "Huff, can you pray for your massa?" Huff's eyes filled with gladness and he said, "Master, Huff has prayed for you ever since you had him whipped." He then kneeled down and prayed so that the master was moved in his soul. After this, he first became a sinner, then a child of God. Huff was his dearest friend.

How shall we amaze Jesus – with honor or unbelief? Will we first become a sinner, then a child of God, and then each other's dearest friends ... forever in heaven?

Amen.

Votum: ***The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.***

Soli Deo Gloria!