

Confrontation in Galilee



SABBATH AFTERNOON

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. “In the latter time he [God] will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (*Isa. 9:1, 2, RSV*). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Coming to a people broken by sin, sickness, ignorance, and poverty, He brought salvation, healing, and new life.

Jesus attracted a huge following in Galilee. For a while He was a sensation, but the storm clouds were gathering. Indeed, the movement reaches a critical point when Jesus feeds the 5,000. Enthusiasm builds to a crescendo as the people surge forward to crown Jesus as their king, but Jesus spurns the offer. Disappointed, many now turn away. And, in a grim foreshadowing of the events that await Jesus, Mark reminds us of the fate that befell John the Baptist, who also had been popular for a time.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Jesus rejected at Nazareth? What parallels existed between the actions of Herod and Pilate? Why did so many start turning away from Jesus? Why was Jesus so harsh against many of the religious traditions of His time?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 6:1–7:23.*

Memory Text: “For they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; have no fear’” (*Mark 6:50, RSV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 30.

Confrontation at Nazareth *(Mark 6:1-5; see also Luke 4:16-30).*

News of Jesus and His miracles had spread all over Galilee, so the people of Nazareth had certainly heard about what He was doing. Nazareth was only a village at that time, with perhaps five hundred to six hundred people, and to have one of their number become famous must have led to a lot of talk among its inhabitants. Luke records that in His teaching Jesus said, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum’ ” *(Luke 4:23)*.

Read carefully Mark 6:3. What are the people saying? Why are they saying it? Why do you think they reacted as they did? Didn’t they, on one level, have reasons to be skeptical?

Why were they so offended at Him? See Luke 4:16-30.

Australians have a colorful expression to describe the same sort of reaction expressed by the people in Jesus’ hometown. They call it “the tall poppy syndrome.” In a field of poppies, when one grows higher than the rest, people seek to cut it down. They don’t want someone to look better or feel better than the rest of them. A similar idea is found in Scandinavia in the term *Jante law*. This expresses an attitude to anyone in a leadership position who says: “Don’t think you are anything special. You are no better than we are. We put you in that position, and we can just as easily remove you.”

“[Jesus] could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith” *(Mark 6:5, NIV)*. The people of Nazareth thought they knew all about Jesus: They had seen Him grow up, knew His parents, brothers, and sisters. To them He was one of them and not anyone special. They thought they knew Him but did not.

In what ways have you misjudged God? Why is it so easy for us, as sinners, to do just that? What lessons have you learned from those mistakes?

Key Text: *Mark 6:2-6*

Teachers Aims:

1. To explain why many people of Jesus' time rejected Him.
2. To show how our expectations of God damage our relationship with Him.
3. To stress that to maintain our faith we must constantly fight against distractions.

Lesson Outline:

I. Not Quite What We Were Expecting (*Luke 4:16-29*).

- A. Many of Jesus' followers wanted Him to meet their own expectations of Him.
- B. Jesus did not hesitate to defy these expectations, even at the cost of His own popularity.
- C. The true nature of His followers' commitment became clear when they abandoned Him.

II. The Messiah We Choose (*Mark 7:5*).

- A. In His role as Messiah, Jesus bore the burden of what people thought He should be.
- B. In spite of what we know to be true, we often try to manipulate God to do our bidding.
- C. Jesus' unwillingness to cater to others' false beliefs played a role in His death.

III. Conforming to His Will (*Mark 7:6-8*).

- A. Our lives are a constant struggle between doing God's will or doing our own.
- B. If we are not watchful, our religion will become a self-serving exercise.
- C. We are not justified by works. However, the life of faith comprises work—on ourselves, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Summary: Wrongly understood, religion can become a selfish quest to have one's needs and desires met. This is the way it was for many people who followed Jesus. Thus, they abandoned Him when He failed to meet their expectations. Jesus does meet our needs, but in order to gain what He offers, we must serve God and others.

COMMENTARY

This week's study portrays Jesus as the model of Christian ministry. The gospel work is not a journey of continuous joy and success. But the lesson shows that no matter what happens on the ministerial path, neither fear nor smug satisfaction are options. " 'Take heart, it is I' " (*Mark 6:50, RSV*) is the Lord's cheering counsel. He is the eternal I who is always with His followers.

The Death of John (*Mark 6:14-22*).

After the account of Jesus sending out the Twelve (*Mark 6:7-13*), Mark adds a detailed record of the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist. This is the only place in his Gospel where Mark diverts from the straight track of portraying Jesus the Man of action. At the outset of his Gospel, Mark gave a brief notice of John the Baptist as the messenger whom God raised up to announce the coming of the Messiah (*Mark 1:2-8*), and he does not mention him again until this point in his narrative. By the time Jesus sent out the Twelve, John had already been murdered, and King Herod speculated that the miracles wrought by Jesus were actually being done by John raised from the dead. The wicked ruler obviously had a troubled conscience over the death of God's servant.

Contrast the actions of Herod here with that of Pilate at the trial of Jesus. See *Matt. 27:11-30, Mark 15:2-20, Luke 23:2-25, John 18:28-38, 19:1-16*.

What role did guilt play in both?

How did both feel about sentencing to death their prisoners?

What role did the wives play in both cases?

What role did worldly kingly power play in both cases?

How were both men manipulated by others?

For Jesus, the news of John's murder and the disgraceful events surrounding it must have come with searching of heart. Not only was He grieved at the loss of His cousin and fellow worker but John's end foreshadowed His own. Ahead of Jesus lay not the executioner's sword but the cross.

In looking at some of the characteristics that both Pilate and Herod displayed, can you see some of the same things in yourself? If so, how can you change? How can you be protected from letting these weaknesses ruin you too?

I. Take Heart When Rejected.

If Jesus had been a politician determined to please the crowds, Nazareth would have given Him a hero's welcome. But Jesus did not come to Nazareth with a message that would massage the souls of His hearers. His message proclaimed freedom, demanded repentance, and identified Himself as the Messiah (*see Luke 4:16-21*). Because this combined to make a bitter pill to swallow, the citizens of Nazareth added up what they knew about Jesus' birth, His mother, family, occupation, and background. The sum of their addition was not equal to the Messiah. After all, was Jesus not one of them? Worse still, was He not the son of Mary? Such questions slandered both His authority and His pedigree. So, why did this Man think He could apply the Messianic prophecies to Himself? (*Isa. 49:8, 9; 61:1, 2; see also Luke 4:18, 19*).

Because their concept of truth was defined by the facts they knew, the people of Nazareth failed to recognize that saving truth is more than facts. It is God's self-disclosure in the Person of Jesus. But Nazareth had no time for such reflection; instead, it chose rejection. When rejection threatens you, take heart; Jesus experienced it also.

II. Take Heart Amid Persecution.

Being a faithful witness to truth is not without its price. It may even cost us our life. Herod could sever John's head but not his soul. The Divine Mender at the final reckoning will resurrect John—head and all. However, He also will ask Herod some head-splitting questions concerning accountability. What will the ruthless, truthless, and spineless Herod say?

The story's characters are complex. John the Baptist, a fearless prophet like Nathan, called sin by its right name and preferred death to falsehood. Herod Antipas equated lust with love, added sin to sin, and lost all sense of truth and morality. Herodias sacrificed both morality and motherhood: one on the altar of lust and the other on the altar of revenge, even at the cost of exposing her own daughter to prostitution. Salome, unwilling to take her own stand, became the pawn in a wicked scheme.

In a world of compromise and half-truths, "the greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57.

III. Take Heart in Discipleship.

Christian discipleship involves more than a call to witness. It requires an abiding relationship with Jesus, participation in His caring ministry, absolute trust in His power, and a willingness to choose Him over all other choices.

The Turning Point *(Mark 6:33-46).*

Read Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand. Study also the parallel account of this event in John 6:1-15, noting especially verses 14, 15. What additional light do you find? Why did Jesus not want them to make Him a king? (See John 3:14, 7:8, 18:36.) After all, wasn't Jesus the King?

John tells us the result of Jesus' refusal to be crowned king: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (*John 6:66, NIV*). In other words, the people became discouraged; their hopes and expectations were dashed; their preconceived notions about whom this Man was weren't fulfilled. And thus, they turned away from Him.

Recount a time in which you turned away from either a person, an organization, whatever, because your expectations weren't met. Were your expectations wrong, or even unrealistic? Should you have done more thinking beforehand? What did you learn from this experience?

In our zeal to win converts, are we not in danger of giving people false expectations about what being a Christian is all about? Should we be promising people that they'll suddenly be happy, fulfilled, healthy, and prosperous if they accept Jesus and join our church? We do have wonderful Bible promises, but these must be kept in context and oftentimes balanced with other texts that let us know the Christian life can sometimes be a struggle, that there are trials, temptations, and suffering along the way. (*See Acts 14:22; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.*)

What false expectations, if any, did you have regarding what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, and even an Adventist? How did you work through them? What advice would you give to someone who is struggling because of false expectations about either the church or God or both?

The call. It is God who issues the call. We merely respond. Moses by the burning bush, Peter by the sea fishing, Paul on the Damascus road—the call comes whichever way God chooses. Obedience to that call involves placing Christ and His kingdom above all distractions (*Mark 6:8, 9*) and recognizing that discipleship is not competition but partnership (*Mark 6:7*). However, Jesus does not promise uninterrupted success (*Mark 6:10, 11*). Rather, He offers us power (*Mark 6:7*) that alone enables us to fulfill our calling.

Caring ministry. Discipleship involves both preaching and car-

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Mark 6:1–7:23*

- ① Is it possible to know someone too well? The folk in Nazareth had seen Jesus grow up among them (*Mark 6:1-3*); and as His reputation grew throughout the region, they must have asked themselves, “What’s the big deal?” Are there ways our familiarity with the gospel or other religious truths makes us complacent? How can we stay enthusiastic about Bible truth?
- ② The lives of John the Baptist and Jesus illustrate the peril of standing for principle. They both were executed because they refused to be silent about the moral and societal deficiencies of religious and political leaders. Yet, we often form associations with community leaders who hold different religious convictions than ours. How do you reconcile the two? Does God call for different strategies at different times? If so, what are they?
- ③ The story of feeding the 5,000 shows that Jesus often met people at the level of their felt needs in order to build relationships and communicate spiritual truths. What are some ways your congregation is meeting the felt needs of your community? What methods have you found useful in moving past satisfying physical needs to ministering to your community’s spiritual needs?
- ④ The Pharisees had developed a culture based on mechanical, rote obedience that was, in many ways, the direct opposite of what God had in mind for His people. It was on this level that Jesus often found Himself in opposition to the Pharisees. His ministry was dedicated to breaking down human standards of behavior in favor of eternal principles defined by God. Give three examples of human traditions Jesus opposed. Give three examples of God’s eternal principles Jesus supported.

Jesus Walks on the Water *(Mark 6:45-56).*

Considering the events depicted in yesterday's lesson, why do you think Jesus chose that particular time to do such an incredible miracle such as walking on the water? What does that tell us about how the Lord will give us what we need to have faith, if we are open to accept it?

After Jesus had walked over the water and entered the boat, it says that the disciples were astonished at what happened. The Greek verb means "astonished beyond comprehension." According to Mark, they didn't consider the miracle of the fish and the loaves, because their hearts were hardened. Even after such an incredible miracle, they still didn't get it.

Review the events in the first six chapters of Mark, up until Christ's walking on the water. What miracles did Jesus perform, and why should they have caused His followers to fully believe in Him? At the same time, what things happened that could have caused them to doubt whom He was? What lessons can we draw from this about faith, about how we get it, about how we maintain it, and about how we could lose it?

As sinful human beings, our natural inclinations are toward evil, toward selfishness, toward sin; thus, it's not natural for us to lean toward a God who is good, selfless, and sinless. No matter what God does for us, no matter how great a view of the Cross we have, no matter what miracles He has done for us, if we don't guard our souls, if we don't cultivate faith, nourish faith, practice faith, and live by faith, our hearts can become hard. Our natural trajectory is downward, earthward, toward self, toward sin, toward death. Only by daily grasping the hand of God, by faith, can we stop the natural downward progression.

Go back over your own walk with the Lord. How were you first converted? What has God done for you since then? Dwell on these things, cling to these things, and pray for the Holy Spirit to purge you of all doubts because of whatever things you don't understand.

ing. Preaching invites people to God. Caring *brings* God to people. When hunger confronted the 5,000, the disciples urged Him to “ ‘send them away’ ”; but Jesus commanded, “ ‘You give them something to eat’ ” (*Mark 6:36, 37, NKJV*). Where humanity sees the impossible, divinity sees the possible; true discipleship must recognize human inadequacy and turn to the omnipotent One, who supplies all our needs (*Phil. 4:19*).

IV. Take Heart Amid Troubles and Traditions.

Discipleship is not a smooth journey. Dangers will arise from many sources: The seas may roar, the wind may be boisterous, and the boat may be about to sink (*Mark 6:45-51*). We might be tempted to use the power of God for our own glory (*John 6:14, 15*). Or we might be tempted to turn salvation by faith into salvation by tradition

Witnessing

Thank God for the dedicated core of men and women who champion religious freedom around the world. What witnesses these warriors of God are to countless individuals confronting dangerous situations because of their faith! These individuals provide counsel and guidance and much-needed prayer to those facing enormous challenges because of their decision to live by the principles of their faith.

In our study this week, we are reminded that new believers and those contemplating joining God’s family are sometimes overwhelmed by the aftereffects of their decision to follow Jesus. The promise of a new life filled with peace and happiness is clouded by the looming possibility that life here on earth just became more difficult, because working on the Sabbath day is no longer an option. Job income and job stability are now at risk. Losing a job places a family in serious crisis—bills go unpaid, foreclosure on a home may occur, even paying for groceries becomes a concern. These new worries place additional stress on the adults, and the marriage itself may suffer. They are confronted daily by trials that threaten their new faith and dependence on God. This is just the way Satan likes to see it happen!

In all probability, you know one or more families or individuals facing such hardships. Your understanding and support can go a long way in helping to minimize the fear and uncertainty they’re facing. Here is a practical way to demonstrate Christ’s love and show faith in action. Offer everything from words of encouragement to help with finding alternate work to forming a prayer chain. Your involvement may be all it takes to keep discouragement at bay.

Confrontation With the Pharisees *(Mark 7:1-23)*.

Read carefully and prayerfully the above texts. If you were asked to summarize, in one sentence, the basic message of the passage, what would you write?

What one passage in these set of verses do you believe catches the essence of what Jesus is saying here? Why did you choose this one text?

Oftentimes critics of religion claim that religion is a man-made construct used to give a certain class of people power over another class. And yet, and here's the irony, this is exactly what Jesus is dealing with. These rituals were being used to help consolidate the power and wealth of the priestly class over and against others.

For instance, God had given instructions regarding defilement in the book of Leviticus, but many more regulations had been added over the centuries. The effect was to exclude more and more of the common people—the sick, maimed, infirm, lepers, and those who did not measure up to the regulations of ritual purity—from the temple services, leaving it, and the power that came with it, in the hands of a small select group.

It's a scary thought (and it should be) that Jesus spent so much of His time fighting, not against pagans or skeptics or agnostics but against very religious people who believed that they were defending their faith. It's scary, too, that in their zeal to defend the commandments of God they actually produced traditions and commandments that at times nullified the commandments they were supposed to be protecting (*see Mark 7:1-11*).

The greatest motive in the world is to do things out of love for God. At the same time, it's also potentially the most dangerous of all motives. Why is that so? Why must those who believe that they are acting in behalf of their God be very careful in what they do in God's "behalf"?

or ritual, thus allowing the letter of the law to replace the Lord of the law (*John 7:1-23*). In all such dangers, Jesus, who uplifted righteousness by faith over pride in one's own works, assures the true disciple: *Take heart, trust in Me, and you will make it to the kingdom.*

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: In all, only about fifty days of Jesus' ministry are touched upon in all the combined Gospels. Jesus' minimum term of ministry equaled three years. That means 0.046 percent, or slightly less than half of 1 percent of Jesus' active ministering is actually recorded in the Gospels. Imagine all the teaching, the conversations, and the ministry we have never heard about. No wonder John wrote, "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written" (*John 21:25, NIV*). With so much proof, why did so many reject Jesus as the Savior?

Thought Questions:

- 1 Jesus was not the type of king the Jews expected. He did not live up to their expectations of a Messiah. How can we present the gospel without giving people the false idea that being Christian means being trouble-free? What are the dangers of having false expectations of Christianity?
- 2 Jesus spent most of His life in Nazareth. He was known as Joseph's son, a carpenter. But when Jesus began His ministry in His hometown, He was rejected. Why do you think the people of Nazareth harbored such resentment to One of their own, especially One doing great things as Jesus was?

Application Questions:

- 1 Throughout His ministry, Jesus faced rejection by the very people He came to save. Yet, He continued His work, never letting the hurt of rejection deter Him from His mission. As Christians we sometimes face the same kind of rejection. How can we be more like Christ and focus on our mission rather than on the negatives?
- 2 The Pharisees were students of Scripture and were regarded as spiritual leaders. But even they rejected Christ and thought Him to be blasphemous. They were so shrouded in their traditions and routines that they left no room for the Spirit to work. How can we keep from falling into a spiritual rut as did the Pharisees?

Further Reading: Read Ellen G. White's "The First Evangelists," "Come Rest Awhile," "Give Ye Them to Eat," "A Night on the Lake," "The Crisis in Galilee," and "Tradition," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 349–371, 377–398.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, have people relate some times where they, believing they were acting in behalf of God, now believe that they made a mistake. What did they do? How did they treat people? What might they have done differently if they knew what they know now? What lessons did they learn that might be able to help others from making the same mistakes?
- 2** What did Jesus mean in Mark 7:20 about defilement? How is Jesus defining defilement here? How is it different from how the rabbis seemed to understand defilement? What principle is made manifest by this difference?
- 3** Jesus spoke very harshly about human traditions. Do you think He was against tradition? If not, why the hard words? What are some of your traditions? Where did they originate from? How do they stand in contrast to the "commandments of God"? Might some of your traditions need to be examined in the context of what Jesus said in Mark 7? How would they fare?

Summary: For many months Jesus has enjoyed huge popular support in Galilee, but a change is coming. We see Him, first of all, rejected by His own people and then by even larger crowds. And we see Jesus confronting the religious establishment in His strongest rebuke to date. No niceties of expression, no mincing of words: These leaders, so proud of their strict observances, are really lawbreakers; their profession is a sham, a hypocrisy.

Jesus is indeed heading toward the Cross.