

Missing Messiah's Might

Mark 6:1-13

A mechanic had a work order to check for a clunking noise when going around corners. He took the car for a drive, made a right turn and heard the loud clunk immediately. Moments later, he returned the keys to the service manager with this note: "Removed bowling ball from trunk."

Despite our best efforts, we malfunction as Christians, sometimes in our personal relationships and responsibilities, sometimes in our spiritual disciplines, sometimes in our collective efforts as the church. When we stall, it is often because something obvious and essential to our progress has been misplaced in the clutter of other agendas. We easily lose sight of our purpose for being in the world as we fall into ruts of habitual motion with no particular objective. Our sacred calling is to be conformed to the image of Jesus. Our mission is to live as His light in the world. But, we often simply function, unrelentingly, even though the nature of that function is indiscernible.

Rafael Antonio Lozano of Plano, Texas has been on a mission since 1997 to visit every company-owned *Starbucks* on the planet. In 1997, there were 1,304 stores worldwide. Today, there are over 12,000 stores in 37 countries. As of this past Friday, he has visited 7,354 stores in this country and 478 abroad. He is realistic about his quest, saying, "As long as they keep building Starbucks, I'll never be finished." He is also realistic about the importance of his mission. "I feel like I've accomplished something" ... "actually I've accomplished nothing." Still, he has many sponsors for his project who make contributions through an online *PayPal* account.

May we always resist becoming distracted by any flurry of activity that veils our divine purpose of honoring Jesus with our lives. This church exists to equip believers as servants and witnesses of Jesus. Believers exist to reflect the righteousness of Jesus in the world around them, at work, across the street and in their homes. Directionless busyness accomplishes none of this.

As we turn our attention to our text, we read of a strange episode in the life of Jesus when even His remarkable, powerful ministry appeared to stall. Might this text also reveal to us why we sometimes feel stalled in our own capacities as spiritual leaders in our homes, as godly examples to those closest to us or as effective witnesses for Jesus to our neighbors, co-workers and friends? As children, we sang regarding "This little light of mine" that we would not "let Satan to pfff it out." Still, at times, it seems as if our little light is barely a flicker. Why? Why does it sometimes seem as if the mighty power of God's *Messiah* is for others, but not for us?

I. Messiah's Might Is Missed wherever Reverence Is Missing (1-4)

A. Jesus Journeyed to Nazareth as an Established Rabbi verses 1, 2a

¹Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ²When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

The "there" referenced in verse one is Capernaum, where Jesus had healed the daughter of Jairus, a local synagogue ruler. On His way to Jairus' home, He also healed a woman with a twelve-year sickness. These two healings occurred immediately after His return from the land of the Gerasenes on the east side of the lake. On the trip over, Jesus had calmed a storm as easily as He would heal a man possessed by a "legion" of demons. Even before those events, Jesus had enjoyed remarkable success as a Teacher, Healer and Exorcist throughout most of Galilee.

It was natural for Jesus to go to Nazareth. His family lived there. But, for Jesus to travel with disciples this way was to present Himself as a rabbi. He entered Nazareth as He might have entered any other village in Galilee. His reputation opened the door to this teaching opportunity at the synagogue. A local synagogue ruler had the option, whenever a guest rabbi came to town, to invite him to read from the Law and to expound on it. Jesus accepted the offer, and those who heard Him were amazed. However, this was not an amazement of admiration. This amazement took a petty turn.

B. Nazareth Felt Compelled to Keep Jesus in His Place verses 2b-4

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

⁴Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

"... he even does miracles!" This is an amazing observation to me. They acknowledged that He did miracles that were more than just card tricks. He drove out demons. He calmed the sea. He raised a girl from the dead. The people of Nazareth did not deny Jesus' wisdom or the veracity of His miracles, but they were offended by Him nevertheless. They could not get past the fact that He had grown up down the block from some of them, and He was nothing special then.

Jesus did not have messianic credentials. He was a carpenter, a tradesman. This is the only glimpse of Jesus we have between the ages of twelve and thirty, when He commenced His public ministry. Mary is mentioned but not Joseph, suggesting that Joseph might be dead. To care for His mother and younger siblings by working as a carpenter until they were on their own could account for what Jesus had been doing all those years. Surely, He had been faithful in regard to His human obligations to His family, but that hardly qualified Him as a prophet.

Jesus did not have a messianic temperament. He was good. He did good things. He seemed to want good things for His people. But, He was a little too good. Sometimes, He was too friendly with Gentiles. He was not nearly hostile enough towards the Romans in the land.

The people of Nazareth were amazed at Jesus' teaching, but they were also offended. Who did He think He was? How dare this uppity homeboy presume any spiritual authority over them? At least one old lady must have protested, "I used to change His swaddling clothes in the synagogue nursery." Jesus was too familiar to them and too much like them for them to ever concede that He might be a great prophet, much less *Messiah*. He was a blue-collar working stiff like them. They could not confer greatness on a local boy posturing Himself as having outgrown them

C. An Overly Familiar Jesus Is a Powerless Jesus

Life in Jesus stalls when He is less to us than He must be. For many, He is a comfortable, sacred relic. Born in Bethlehem, He died for our sins and was raised from the dead to secure Heaven for us. But for many, once His redemptive work was done, Jesus meekly crawled onto a back shelf in their minds. They do not grasp that He is the living Lord of life. He is not a Healer for those who have no burden for being healed. He is not a Reconciler of estranged relationships for those who are either content with their damaged relationships or are unwilling to obey Him to the end that those relationships might be repaired. Let Him be not Lord, but rather, the harmless, non-demanding and amiable Jesus they have always known. That should relegate Him to silence.

Our lives stall when we have no expectation of the wondrous. Our lives sputter when we have no sense of His might. He is the Lion of Judah, our mighty King and the Conqueror of our sins. He is the Power for us to live differently than we have ever lived before. Where there is no sense of the wonder of Jesus Christ, the world is a dangerous and barren place.

II. Messiah's Might Is Missed wherever Reliance Is Missing (5-11)

A. Jesus' Ministry Stalled in Nazareth verse 5, 6a

...⁵He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

"He could not do any miracles there ..." These strange words are best understood to mean that the atmosphere was not right for Jesus to carry on a great miracle ministry. If He could control a tempest on Galilee, the faithlessness of His hometown could not shut Him down were He inclined to work miracles. But, many healings, especially those recorded in Mark, were prompted by the faith of those who came to Him. In Nazareth, He healed a few sick people, but there were no crowds clamoring for healing, and there was certainly no enthusiasm that He might be *Messiah*. In His hometown, He was just Jesus the carpenter, and they couldn't get past that.

B. Faith Causes Jesus' Servants to Trust Him Explicitly for their Needs verses 6b-10

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. ⁸These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.

Ministry in Nazareth went nowhere, so Jesus resumed His efforts in the other towns of Galilee. He sent the Twelve out in pairs. "Sent" is the verbal form of the noun translated *apostle*, or "one who is sent." The Twelve proclaimed Jesus' message. Their power over demons was His power. They went out "two by two" to authenticate their testimony about Jesus to their fellow Jews. The Law of Moses taught that weight was given to a matter if two or three testified to it.

While the ineffectiveness of Jesus' ministry in Nazareth was due to an amazing lack of faith, the measure of the Apostles' capacity to effectively represent Jesus was their complete faith in Him for their provision. As a measure of their willingness to thoroughly trust Jesus and to solely rely on Him for their provision, He sent them forth with an order to travel light.

I know people who pack multiple suitcases for a weekend. I know others who can live two weeks out of a gym bag. When my best man drove to our wedding in Oklahoma from college in Texas, I vividly remember him emerging from his red 1971 VW Beetle and fully extending his 6'3" frame. He was wearing jeans and a T-shirt. He had a change of underwear in his right hand and a toothbrush in his left. I thought that was traveling light. Fortunately, we had the tuxedos on site.

Jesus sent the Twelve forth with the clothes on their back, sandals and a walking stick. They were to trust God for every need. If they accepted an invitation in any town, they were to remain with that host for the duration of their stay. Jesus did want them to exhibit ingratitude or dissatisfaction by keeping their eyes open for better accommodations. They needed to conduct themselves as fully confident that God would provide and fully content in what He did provide.

That's a pretty simple lesson, folks. God is our true Provider, and He may just allow our joy and our effectiveness to sputter and stall until we are willing to conduct ourselves as though we really believe that we are utterly dependent on Him. Faith is the willingness to trust and obey God when we know His mind, no matter what. We do not have to see around the next corner.

C. Faith Causes God's Servants to Embrace His Sense of Urgency verse 11

...¹¹And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."

By leaving a town with such symbolic finality as to shake the dust off their feet, the disciples were declaring that the inhabitants of any such town were now God's problem. The Twelve must share with Jesus His sense urgency about proclaiming the Kingdom in all the villages of Galilee rather than to overstay in one village, beating disinterested dead horses.

We all have people in our lives that we desperately wish would come to the Lord or demonstrate a greater commitment to Him. As hard as it is to accept, a time comes when we have to leave them in the Lord's hands and get on with the business of serving God in more productive ways.

"Ministers pay far too much attention to people who do not come to services. Those people should, generally, be given exactly that disregard by the pastor that they give to Christ. The Christian leader has something more important to do than pursue the godless. The leader's task is to equip the saints until they are like Christ ... and history and the God of history waits for him to do this job." - Dallas Willard

III. Messiah's Might Is Missed wherever Repentance Is Missing (12, 13)

¹²They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

A. Repentance Must Be Preached Wherever God Visits His People

Without the physical presence of Jesus, the Apostles went forth and ministered with a more conspicuous outpouring of power than Jesus Himself had demonstrated in His hometown of Nazareth. Once again, people were healed in great numbers. Once again, demons were on the run. The difference appears to be closely identified with the preaching of repentance. The presence of repentance speaks to an openness to God that invites an outpouring of His grace.

The ministry of a prophet always involved a call to repentance. Where there was no need for repentance, there would be no need for a prophet of God, for without sin, there would be no estrangement from God in the first place. God is holy; He will not dwell in the presence of unholy people. God's forgiveness is a great gift, but it cannot be appropriated apart from the repentance of a sinner who acknowledges his or her need to turn from the cancer of sin.

To proclaim repentance boldly requires that we be unashamed of God's holiness, because the message of repentance implies that people are sinners. Certain mainline denominations have abandoned the message of repentance for a message of affirmation. As behaviors long defined as sin in the Bible are vying for mainstream acceptance, these churches have simply redefined them to no longer be sin at all. No one wants to be called a sinner and no one wants to call anyone a sinner. But, there is a sense in which calling sin "sin" is the most positive message in the world:

"Sin is the best news there is ... because with sin, there's a way out ... You can't repent of confusion or psychological flaws inflicted by your parents - you're stuck with them. But you can repent of sin. Sin and repentance are the only grounds for hope and joy ..." - John Alexander

B. Many Christians Misunderstand Repentance

"Didn't I repent when I came to Jesus? Wasn't that a part of the plan of salvation?" Many fail to realize that denial of self, which is manifested in repentance, will be a daily discipline until Jesus returns and we are made fully like Him. Many have lost connection with the old Scottish and English divines who said, "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." They now operate on a premise that man's chief end is to receive all that He can from God - blessings, health, prosperity, influence, power, success – none of which affirm God's centrality in all things or remotely challenges man as the center of his own universe.

Others struggle with old demons and recurring sins because they have never grasped the disciplines of true repentance. They repented in the opening moments of their life in Christ, but no one ever taught them the practical demands of repentance. Repentance is fleeing situations that produce temptation. Repentance is accountability to other Christians who will pray for you and keep tabs on you. That galls the western spirit of rugged individualism, but like it or not, to defeat sin, a man must go beyond remorse and fleshly determination. He must burn certain bridges and ask for help from Christ, not metaphysically, but through His people, His church.

Repentance is readjustment, not sentiment. A husband is driving. His wife is navigating. She tells him to turn right, but by mistake, he turns left. She points out his error. He says, "Sorry, dear," but he never turns around. She points out his error again, and he answers, "But, I said, 'I'm sorry.'" Obviously, "sorry" won't get them any closer to where they want to be. Mere "sorry" only gets them farther away. Without a correction of course, "sorry" is not repentance at all.

The world needs Jesus. The church needs power. Believers need to bear fruit. When progress in these areas stalls, we must ask: Do we truly *revere* Jesus, or do we keep Him in a place where we are comfortable keeping Him? Do we truly *rely* on Jesus? Do we grasp that without utter dependence on Him, we can accomplish nothing of eternal consequence? Are we *repentant* over those things that keep us from serving Him? Will we readjust our lives to His will? Reverence - Reliance – Repentance ... These are the things that unleash His power in us and through us.