

MARK 6:1-13
ST JAMES', 8.7.18, 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

Back in Mark 1:14-15, we read this: *Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*

As we think about this passage from Mark chapter 6, let's not forget that Jesus is still proclaiming the good news of God - all the way through to chapter 16! In this passage there are two stories; the first one shows how important it is to *believe*, and the second one shows how important it is to *repent*.

Jesus has come to establish the kingdom of God. In other words, he's spreading God's rule, God's sovereignty, or God's reign, on earth. That's the purpose behind everything Jesus does. God's reign isn't spread by force. God's not a dictator. He calls us to repent and believe, but he doesn't force us to do so. The people of Nazareth exercised their right not to believe. And Jesus tells the disciples what to do when they meet people who refuse to repent. Let's look at the first story, and think about why Jesus' family and friends in Nazareth refused to believe.

FAITH

Jesus had lived in Nazareth most of his life. He'd grown up there, and we presume he'd followed Joseph in to the family business as a carpenter. Then, a few weeks earlier, he'd suddenly disappeared. For

the first six or seven weeks, no-one had a clue what had happened to him. Then they began to realise that the young preacher saying and doing amazing things about 20 miles away in the Capernaum area, was their own village carpenter. And now he'd come home. This was their opportunity to hear and see him in action for themselves!

We can see in verse 2 that they were impressed. Jesus' sermon made much better sense than what they usually heard on a Saturday morning! And it seems that no-one even questioned the fact that he'd done some amazing things - like healing the woman with the haemorrhage, and raising Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:21-43).

But the people of Nazareth can't accept that Jesus is anyone special. They've known him too long. They've seen him grow up. They've watched him working in the carpenter's shop. His brothers and sisters are just ordinary people, and so's his mother. And *they* don't seem to think there's anything special about him either - in fact, according to 3:21, they think he's mad! And so, despite being amazed at Jesus' preaching, and despite the miracles they know he's done, the people of Nazareth refuse to believe what should have been obvious: that Jesus is at the very least a prophet sent by God himself (v 4). Instead, they take offence at him.

The problem is that by rejecting Jesus, the people of Nazareth are rejecting God's kingdom, they're rejecting the opportunity to be rescued from all that's evil. When Jesus healed the sick, or cast out demons, he

was showing what God's kingdom was all about. He was also showing that he has power over Satan. Disease isn't part of God's original plan for his universe. Nor are evil spirits. Christians are looking forward to the time when God will create a new heavens and a new earth. That's when God's kingdom will be finally and completely established.

Nothing which is evil will have a place there. Satan himself will be destroyed. In the meantime, God's rule or reign is invading enemy-occupied territory. When people accept it, one result is that God can rescue them from disease or evil spirits. When people reject God's rule or reign in their lives, like the people of Nazareth in this story, God can't rescue them. And so we read in verse 5, that Jesus *could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few people who were ill and heal them*. Those few sick people were desperate enough to accept him, and believe in him.

As far as we know, Jesus never set foot in Nazareth again. His family came to believe in him later, after the resurrection. We don't know about the rest of the village. But for the moment, Jesus is left amazed at the lack of faith amongst the people of his home village.

And so we see how important it is to believe. Now we'll see how important it is to repent.

REPENTANCE

When Jesus called his disciples, back in chapter 1, he told them that he would make them fishers of men. When they leave Nazareth at the end of tonight's first story, the time has come for them to begin fishing!

They've heard Jesus preaching, they've seen him heal people of disease, and deliver them from evil spirits. Now it's their turn! So *they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed with oil many people who were ill and healed them* (vv 12-13).

Jesus' disciples were ordinary men. If you think it's scary talking to people about Jesus, imagine how the disciples felt when they suddenly found that they were expected to heal people and drive out demons! And if that wasn't scary enough, they weren't allowed to take anything with them. They were learning to depend on God, both for the power to carry on Jesus' work, and for their food and shelter as well. They weren't only spreading the good news about God's kingdom by what they said and did, but also by the way they lived while they were on this mission.

Actually, hospitality to strangers was a sacred duty in C1 Palestine. It would be very unusual for travellers *not* to be made welcome and offered food and shelter. Even so, Jesus tells them what to do if people don't welcome them or listen to their message: they're to shake the dust off their feet when they leave (v 11). This is what Jews used to do if they'd had to travel through a non-Jewish area. When they reached Jewish territory again, they shook the dust off their feet. So, by shaking the dust off their feet when leaving a *Jewish* village, the disciples would have been showing the villagers that rejecting their message was an extremely serious matter.

And that's the only reason that people were likely to reject the disciples: their message. In verse 12 we read that their message was that people should turn away from their sins. This ties in with Jesus' message back in chapter 1, that people should repent and believe the good news! (1:15). The people of Nazareth refused to believe. But here we see that believing isn't enough on its own. People who want to accept God's rule also need to turn away from their sins. They need to change their attitude to God. They need to admit that they've been rebelling against him; to admit that they deserve the death penalty, because they've broken God's law; to admit that there's nothing they can do about it. A person who has repented recognises that they've done nothing to deserve God's favour, and that they can only learn to obey God because God himself gives them the power to change.

The disciples told people that they should repent before they drove out demons and healed people who were sick. People needed to repent and believe the Good News if they were to accept God's rule, God's reign, in their lives, and allow the Lord to rescue them from the disease and demons which were the result of Satan's power over them. People can't accept God's rule in their lives if they don't intend to keep his Law. That was true then, and it's still true now.

CONCLUSION

I said at the beginning that Jesus was still proclaiming the good news of God through to chapter 16. In fact, Jesus is still proclaiming the good news of God today. Jesus has come to rescue us - to rescue us from the punishment we deserve for breaking God's law, to rescue us from

the power of Satan, which shows itself in many ways, but in our passage today, especially through disease and evil spirits. Just as the people in Nazareth and the other villages in Galilee needed to repent and believe the good news if they wanted receive the blessings of God's rule in their lives, so do we need to do the same. In these two stories, we can see that those who did repent and believe were healed of sickness, and released from the power of evil spirits. God also forgave them for rebelling against him, and gave them power to change and to learn to obey him.

All those things are still true today, if only we're willing to allow God to rule in our lives. It doesn't mean we'll become perfect overnight, and it doesn't mean we'll automatically be cured of all our disease. But the Lord does promise that he'll forgive us, he'll rescue us from the power of Satan, he'll accept us, he'll come and live in us, he'll give us peace, he'll give us purpose for our lives, he'll give us power to change, and that ultimately we'll meet him face to face. All we have to do is to repent and believe the Good News!