



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 6: 1-13

Mark

"A Prophet Without Honor"

TRANSCRIPT

Our passage is Mark chapter 6. And if you have your Bibles open, follow along with me as I read verses 1 through 13.

And He went out from there and came into His hometown; and His disciples followed Him. When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He wondered at their unbelief.

And He was going around the villages teaching.

And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff— no bread, no bag, no money in their belt— but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. "Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." They went out and preached that

men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and bless our time of study in it together. Let's bow now for a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for the privilege we have to gather together as a people who have been redeemed from the foundation of the world, redeemed by the blood of Your Son, not by any works of our own. And so, we begin this time together acknowledging Your sovereign grace over us. We are a saved people. We who have put our faith in Christ. Not through any work of our own, not through the work of our faith, for that matter, but through the work of Your Son and that work according to Your electing grace. Thank You, Father, for that work of grace that has sought us out and taken us out of this world, and given us citizenship, and heaven, and eternal life.

And bless our time together this morning, Father, that it would be profitable, and it would be helpful in preparing us for the week ahead. We pray that You'd bless us spiritually through the teaching of the word, and it should give us hearts to hear and minds to think critically as we go through the passage, and pray that we would make good application of the passage that we consider. We pray that Christ would be exalted in all these things, that we would be edified and built up in the faith. It is a privilege, Father, to study the Scriptures and a privilege to study them together as a church. It's a privilege to pray, Lord, and we remember that exhortation that was just given to us, remember those whose names are listed on this prayer request. And we pray that You'd bless them. We pray specifically for some of those, Claire Mills, and we pray that You bless her in the hospital, and pray that You would give her a very safe and healthy delivery in the days to come. Remember Lawrence Bate, and pray that You would give strength to him and mercy to him and to his wife, Virginia. We pray for Bob Messic, pray that You'd extend healing mercy to him. And we pray for Sayid Hamidkahni and pray that You'd bless his ministry abroad and pray that You'd give him physical strength, emotional, spiritual strength, and pray that You would enable him to teach many Your word and teach it clearly. We pray that for ourselves now as we look at the Scriptures and pray that You'd bless us with that instruction. May this be a profitable time together, we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

[Message] We're studying this morning a disturbing incident in our Lord's life, and one that's disturbing also because it underscores a danger that I think exists in evangelical churches, places where the Word of God is taught Sunday after Sunday. We have an expression that I think captures the essence of the problem, and that is "familiarity breeds contempt." And, the truth of that is vividly played out in our passage this morning when the Lord returns home to Nazareth and is rejected. It serves as a warning to us against becoming familiar with our Lord, familiar with His word, yet without faith.

Well, there's a warning here in the passage, at least the first half, but there's also something of an exhortation in the second half because this passage is followed by another in which we have a very encouraging reminder that familiarity with faith brings the greatest of blessings. And so, there's an admonition on the one hand that we'll consider first, and then, or rather, a warning that we will consider first of admonition, and then an exhortation.

The Lord must've loved very greatly the people of Nazareth. He had grown up among them. They knew Him well. He had lived there for some 30 years. They had watched Him grow from youth to adulthood, watched Him develop as a carpenter in Joseph's shop. And after Joseph had died, seen Him take over the business, admired His craftsmanship, admired His honesty. They had eaten with Him. They had lived with Him, seen Him in His blamelessness and His perfect life.

And yet, all of that was lost on them when He returned as their teacher and their Messiah. As one writer puts it: they simply could not believe that one who was so much like them could be so different from them. Familiarity breeds contempt. Blessings that are received in abundance can begin to seem commonplace, even a bit boring. When we become used to having them without any trouble, we can hold them cheap as Bishop Ryle has said. People of Nazareth did that with our Lord.

When He returns to His hometown, He's really riding the crest of His popularity. He has stilled the storm on the sea. He has delivered a man of legion. He has conquered sickness and death and been believed on by all of those who have been blessed by Him. And yet, He returns home to a people who should have received His teaching as true and His presence among them as a blessing, but who didn't. They had become too familiar with Him, without faith.

His return to Nazareth was not for the personal visit to His family. He was there in an official capacity. He was there on a mission. His disciples were with Him, and this was something of a period of training for them. He appeared in the town without great fanfare. On the Sabbath, he went to the synagogue, as was customary and, verse 2 states, "began to teach." And not surprisingly, the response of the listeners was one of astonishment. They were saying: where did this man get these things? "And, what is this wisdom given to Him and such miracles as these performed by His hands?" There's no record that records the miracles or any miracles that were performed in Nazareth. What they are referring to here are reports of miracles that He had performed throughout the land. And what they had heard about Him and what they were hearing Him teach in the synagogue that day astonished them. He spoke with clarity and authority. He possessed power.

And so, they were asking themselves: where did He get these things? Where did He get this wisdom? Where did He get this power? Well, there was only one of two places He could've gotten that. He could've gotten that from God of heaven, or He could've gotten that from Satan. And surprisingly, they must've been thinking the latter, because their amazement was not one of joy, but one of hostility, as verse 3 indicates. They said, "Is this not the carpenter?" In other words, this is the same man that used to repair my roof, that fixed my gate, that built my table. He's just a common man, an ordinary person. He's the town carpenter. He's no different from the rest of us. How can He be a rabbi? How can He be a miracle worker?

They couldn't believe that someone so much like them could be so different from them. The next statement is also derogatory. "Is this not the son of Mary?" Now, on the surface, that may seem a fine statement, a true statement. But, it was not customary among the Jews to refer to a man as the son of his mother, even after his father had passed away. That was something that was said with an insulting intent. This is probably the intent here. They intended this as an insult, the sense being: we don't even know who His real father is, suggesting that they had heard rumor that the Lord was illegitimate.

Well, if so, it indicates that they were aware of unusual circumstances surrounding His birth. And Matthew's account of this, in Matthew 13, they are recorded as saying: is this not the carpenter's son? So there, they do refer to Joseph. Here, they don't. We should probably understand this as being a case in which, in this

rather large synagogue, various statements were made. Both statements that are recorded in Matthew and in Mark were statements that were made, but it may be that Mark chose the slanderous one in order to allude to our Lord's birth.

As you aware, in writing his gospel, he chose not to record the birth of our Lord. Mark begins with John's ministry and begins with our Lord's ministry at the baptism, and then His period of testing in the wilderness. He skips over the Lord's birth and His childhood altogether that are given some detailed attention in Matthew and Luke. And, some have taken that, some critics of the faith have taken that to indicate that Mark did not believe in the virgin birth because he makes no mention of it.

Well, that's an argument from silence, and so not a very strong argument, but it has been made. And some have tried to answer it from this particular verse in Mark by suggesting that Mark chose this statement by the people of Nazareth in order to safeguard his readers from the idea or from supposing that Joseph was the son of our Lord, and in so doing, allude to the Lord's virgin birth.

That's a possible explanation, but the statement still suggests the Nazarene's hostility toward our Lord. They knew Him well. They knew His family. They go on to mention the names of His brothers and mention His sisters and state that they're living with Him in town. The point being: we know Him very well. We know Him. We know His family. We know His background. But their close association with Him, their knowledge of Him didn't give them a deeper appreciation of Him. They identified Him too closely with themselves. And so, Mark concludes they took offense at Him. That word "offense" is a rather strong word. It's the word from which we get our word "scandal." And it carries the idea of being offended and being repelled by a person to the point that one abandons that person. They had done that with our Lord, someone they had seen from His youth, they knew well, and now they're abandoning Him.

And so, the Lord responds with their doubts about His legitimacy with a proverb in verse 4. Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." That was a rather common proverb in the ancient world, not only with the Jews, but also with the Greeks, and one that we see our Lord use elsewhere. Because in John chapter 4 and verse 44, He makes a very similar statement. He says a prophet has no honor in his

own country. Same statement, only a little more succinctly put. And, we see that in His own country, in His own home, in His own family, as He says in our passage. And that's already been demonstrated in this gospel.

You remember in chapter 3, His family had shown a great deal of doubt to His own legitimacy, the legitimacy of His ministry, and they tried to forcibly stop His ministry and take Him home because, as the text says, they thought that He had lost His senses.

In John chapter 7, it's recorded that the Lord's brothers at that time didn't believe in Him. Now, His hometown was dishonoring Him. It all anticipates the greater rejection that will come from His own countrymen at the end of His ministry, and that's merely an illustration of the greater rejection that's coming from His entire creation, His, the whole world population, in the sense that Jews and Gentiles alike reject Him.

But here, it's underscoring, particularly the fact that those closest to Him have rejected Him because, to put it in that phrase that we have: familiarity breeds contempt. And so, in the face of unbelief, the Lord restricted His ministry in Nazareth. He stopped teaching and healing. He healed only a few people. Verse 5 states: "He could do no miracles there."

Vincent Taylor, a British New Testament scholar and an author of a significant commentary on the Book of Mark, wrote that this passage, that particular verse, verse 5, is one of the boldest statements in the gospels since it mentioned something that Jesus could not do. Well, that's true, but the reason that the Lord could do no miracles was not due to a lack of power on His part, but a determination to withhold blessing.

God is omnipotent. He is all-powerful. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the Trinity, is omnipotent. All-powerful. He cannot be frustrated by man's unbelief, as though unbelief is greater than God's power. And so, if that's the sense that Mr. Taylor has in his statement, then he's wrong about that.

The Lord is greater than any power on earth, greater than the unbelief of men. But, He works according to principles that He has set. And He does not force blessings upon those who will not receive them. And so, just as He taught in parables earlier, as you remember, when the people were showing signs of unbelief, and in so doing, hid the truth from them and only revealed it to those who were believing later. So here, He withheld miracles from those who had willfully rejected Him.

Miracles are a form of revelation. They are signs. John makes a particular point of that, using that word very frequently to describe the miracles that our Lord performed. And as signs, their purpose is in identifying our Lord, identifying Him as the one who would come, the one who had been prophesied by the prophets of old. Isaiah in particular. But Moses as well. And, those miracles show us something of the nature of His ministry. The salvation and the restoration of that ministry. So, they're a form a revelation in themselves.

But the people of Nazareth, as we see from verse 2, had already heard about these miracles. They knew what they were testifying about Him. And yet, they had rejected our Lord. And, so to perform any more miracles would have been of little to no value at all.

We can only go as far as our faith takes us, and not any farther than that. And they had no faith. They were not believing, and so He would perform no more miracles there. Could He have changed their hearts so that they would have received Him, and so that they would have believed upon Him and wanted to see miracles, and wanted our Lord? Well, yes, of course He could've. In fact, only God can change hearts. And it's by means of the changed heart, by means of regeneration that people come to Him. There's no coming to Him apart from that. There's no coming to our Lord apart from our Lord's initiation in bringing people to Him. That's the clear testimony of Scripture. That's grace.

Let me give you just a few examples from both the Old and the New Testament. Jeremiah 31:33. The prophet states, Lord God, through the prophet states: I will put My law within them and on their heart I will ride it. God is the author of that change; He is the one who is saying in that, "I am going to give them a heart that will respond. I'm the one that will do it. They won't do it for themselves." Of course, that's true not only of, that's not just old covenant truth. That's truth for all people throughout the ages. Ezekiel 36 verses 25 and 26 is perhaps even a little stronger. "I will cleanse you from all your filthiness. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from you, form your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh." God creates, in other words, in unbelieving people the disposition to believe. He changes people from unbelieving people to believing people.

It's not that He's saying: if you respond, I'll give you a heart of flesh. He's saying: I'm going to take the heart of stone out, that which resists me, and give you in its place a heart of flesh. He's the one that changes people. We see it in John 6:44. "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him." 2 Timothy 1:8 and 9, where the gospel is described as being according to the power of God. And then, Paul writes, who has saved us, speaking of God, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity. It's not our works that saves us; God saves us according to His own purpose.

The mystery of God's sovereign grace, the mystery of His distinguishing grace is that He changes the hearts of some and doesn't change others. Why He doesn't change some hearts is something we can't know. He certainly is under no obligation to change them. Men are guilty of their own sins, and while God is obligated by His holiness to judge the sinner, He's not obligated to save the sinner.

And yet, He does, and He saves a multitude of sinners through the blood of His Son. And that's grace. Salvation is of grace. That He changes the hearts of any is what should cause us to ask why. Not that He doesn't change the hearts of some.

So, the answer to the question: could He have changed the hearts of His neighbors, His friends from Nazareth? The answer to that is yes. Why, we can't say, but it's according to His purpose. And, the fact that they did not believe, I think, underscores that point just made that the thing that's amazing, the thing that should cause us to ask why He would save any, that's underscored in verse 6, or rather in this whole narrative here. But our Lord, in a sense, underscores it in His response in verse 6. It's underscored by the reception that they gave Him. It's one of unbelief. With all of the privilege they have, of all of the knowledge they have, they reject Him. And as verse 6 states, the Lord was amazed by their lack of faith. He probably saw old friends turn from Him, and so He wondered at their unbelief, as Mark writes.

This word, to wonder, or to marvel, occurs some 30 times in the gospels. And only 3 times is it used of Christ. In Matthew and Luke, we have two of those usages, and they're used of the same incident. When He marveled at a Roman Centurion's faith. He was a man who lacked all of the advantages of the Jews, and yet he believed, and the Lord said, "Truly, I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." The only other place that that word "marveled" is used is here, in our passage,

when He marveled at His countryman's unbelief. Faith wasn't expected of the Gentile; it was expected among His own neighbors, His own people. And so, He was amazed by their unbelief. Amazed in His human nature, amazed in His human soul. It's a reminder of His true humanity. Not amazed in His deity.

But the point here is not the psychology of Jesus. The point is the guilt of the people, and that's underscored in this passage. In spite of all of their privilege of having watched our Lord grow up, as Luke tells us in Luke chapter 2, watching Him as He was increasing in wisdom and stature, in favor with God and men, seeing all of that, seeing Him in His perfection, and then rejecting Him. That is amazing, but it reminds us of the danger of familiarity. It does breed contempt, especially in matters of faith.

I say it's amazing, and our Lord marveled, and so it is amazing, but that's not to say it's uncommon, because it's all too common. Think of Israel. Led out of Egypt by the strong hand of God, by mighty signs and wonders, led into the desert and through the desert for some 40 years, being provided for every day. Pillar of cloud by day; pillar of fire by night. And for 40 years, they were given mana. Wonderful food, a heavenly food that is described with taste that was like wafers with honey. Must've been marvelous food. And yet, when they got used to it, they got bored with it, and they began to grumble about it and complain about it. And they would speak of it as "this mana," and describe it as miserable food.

Well, people today do the same thing with the Word of God. We treat it the way they treated mana, the way the people of Nazareth treated our Lord. People listen to the Word of God, and after a period of time, they begin to want something different, something new that will offer some stimulus to a bored spirit, rather than devoting themselves to the scriptures and to prayer, to studying and mastering sound doctrine.

And then we wonder: what's happening in the church? We wonder why it's becoming so much like the world, with so many personal problems, so much divorce, and the list can go on of the ailments and the problems that we see within Bible-believing churches. Believer's Chapel is no exception to that. We've been greatly blessed here over the years, for some 30 years, the Word of God has been taught Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday after Wednesday, and weekly Bible studies. But, we can become too familiar with all of that. Familiar without faith, without listening,

without obeying. The result is that our hearts will become cold, and we'll begin to drift. It can happen to each one of us.

It can happen with the Lord's supper. We celebrate that every Sunday night. We take the Lord's supper and we become very familiar with it, that we can become so familiar with it that it stops being special to us. As a result, we begin to fall into something of a routine, and to a dull habit that loses its meaning. And that's what happens when we become too familiar with something, without continually looking at it, or studying it with faith.

And what that really means is like the church at Ephesus. We've left our first love when that occurs. Just as the Lord did no miracles in Nazareth because of the hardness of their heart, He can remove His blessings and power from this place as well. Not suggesting that that has happened, but it can happen. And we must guard against it. We do that I think in more than one way, but we do that first of all by learning the lesson of Nazareth and taking the warning that was given to the church at Ephesus. Be aware of the danger of familiarity and pray that the Lord will deliver us from it. And we are to do just what the Lord instructed the church at Ephesus to do when He told them to remember from where you have fallen, repent, and do the deeds that you did at first. So, we're to do that.

By its unbelief, Nazareth deprived itself of blessing. It deprived itself of miracles. But those who did believe in the Lord, the disciples, they not only witnessed miracles by the Lord; they were given the power and the authority to perform miracles. That occupies the remainder of our passage, and I think it illustrates, at least in principle, what J Grisham Machen meant when he spoke of the high adventure of the Christian religion. We see that in these disciples.

The Lord left Nazareth in its unbelief and toured other villages in the region. Then, He appointed His disciples to carry on His ministry throughout the region of Galilee, which Mark records in verses 7 through 13. In verse 7, our Lord equips them. We read, " And He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." They had spent a great deal of time with Him. They had witnessed our Lord's power. They had listened to His teaching. And all of this time, He had been training them according to the promise that He had made to them back in chapter 1 to make them fishers of men. Now, He was sending them out to be that.

And one way in which they were able to learn to do that was by doing that very thing. We learn by doing, and that was what they were now to do. He had equipped them for the task, and sent them out. I think there's a pattern in that. He never sends out His people without adequately equipping them for the mission that He has given them to do. We, as we think about that, don't feel adequate for the mission, for the Christian life, or any kind of service if we think seriously about it. And we aren't adequate. None of us are adequate of ourselves. But, then, His mission is never to be undertaken in our own strength with our own sense of adequacy. Every believer in Christ, though, has been equipped for what He commands us to do, because every one of us is equipped with the Holy Spirit. He empowers us, He guides us, and He's always with us. We've been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and we can know what He would have us to do, the task that He has given to us by reading the Scriptures, by praying about it, by living a life of obedience, by walking by the Spirit.

The Lord's instruction for us, what He would have us to do in the Christian life, is spelled out for us in the Scriptures. And so, we're to be daily searching the Scriptures. That's where His marching orders are, and the Spirit of God applies those instructions to us in the variety of different occasions and ways in which it can be applied to us as we study, and as we respond in faith.

So, our instructions in the Word of God, and the instruction that the Lord gave to His disciples is found in verses 8 and 9. And two things should be noticed in His instruction. First, a sense of urgency; and second, the implicit command that they were to trust God for everything. They were to take only what they were wearing, with the exception of a staff, He says in verse 8. No food, no traveling bag, no money.

Matthew records that they were not to acquire gold or silver or copper for their money belts. The only clothing that they were to take was the sandals they were wearing, and one tunic. So, they were to travel light. Their preparations were to be simple. Their concern was to be for the mission. It was not to be for comfort. It was not to be for luxury. And that very fact would set them off from other missionaries of that day, traveling teachers and philosophers who were very common in the Hellenistic world. Who, as one writer states, made a good thing out of their preaching.

They were to avoid all of that. They were to avoid the appearance of being engaged in business. The gospel was free, and there was to be no question about that. So, they weren't to appear to be out doing business or doing this for any other reason than just to make the Word of God known, the good news of the gospel known.

And actually, this instruction wasn't all that unusual. Alfred Edersheim, in his classic study, "The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah," writes that rabbis gave similar command against taking a staff and shoes and money belt into the precincts of the temple. They were to avoid, those who went to the temple were to avoid all appearances of being engaged in other business. He also states that at least some of the rabbis gave earnest instruction that the law and the traditions were to be taught freely, since they had been received freely.

So, the instruction here is not all that unfamiliar. The disciples likely had heard it from the rabbis, or knew that this was what they had also taught their followers. But, how much more true this was of our Lord's disciples. They were to be devoted to their mission, to the things of the Lord, not absorbed in the things of this world. And to do that, they needed to learn to depend upon the Lord, to depend upon His providential care for them, His providential care to sustain them. It certainly has an application to us. Luxury and prosperity are not the goals of the church, not the goals of God's ministers, not the goals of God's people. Material things are good, and they are to be kept in their proper perspective. They're good when they are kept in their proper perspective, but they are not to become the objects of our affection. And, they are certainly no measure of our spiritual wealth.

One church in the New Testament that boasted of its wealth was the church at Laodicea. It said, "I am rich, I have become wealthy." But Christ answers that response by saying that it was lukewarm, and wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. It was poor and it didn't realize it. It may have had material things, but it had a spiritual deadness about it. A church can have money. It can have buildings. It can have programs and all of that is good, and all of that is helpful. But if Christ isn't the center of it, then the church has lost its sense of mission. It's lost its purpose. It's really lost its very life, and it has nothing.

That's not only true of a church; it's true personally. In fact, if it's true of a church, then you can be sure it's true of the people of that church. Individually, we can suffer the same kind of thing if Christ is not the center and focus of the Christian

life. If He has become so familiar to us, if we become so used to hearing about Him Sunday after Sunday, or Wednesday night after Wednesday night, so familiar that it becomes commonplace, then we are poor regardless of the material things that we've amassed in this world.

The disciples were to keep things simple. They were to have a sense of urgency about their mission, devote themselves to their mission, and look to the Lord to provide for them. Those principles apply to the church. That's the way I think we're to understand this specific mission that we're studying here in Mark chapter 6, in terms of general principles. The mission itself and the instructions that our Lord gave to His disciples apply literally only to this brief mission in our Lord's lifetime.

That's clear from the Book of Luke because both this passage and another passage are included there. In Luke chapter 22, the Lord reverses all of the instruction that we read here. He tells the disciples: "When I sent you out without purse and bag and sandals, you did not lack anything did you?" And they said, "No, nothing." There's something very instructive in that. I don't want to get too much onto this. Time is running out. But they looked back on the blessings that God had provided. Remember, in Luke 22 looking back on this mission that we're studying here, and they're going out not knowing if they're going to be provided for. They're going out without anything to sustain them. And we look at this in retrospect in Luke 22, and He asked: "Did you lack anything?" He didn't take anything to sustain you. Did you lack anything? And they could say, "No, nothing. We lacked absolutely nothing." In other words, God provided for them all along the way, and they were to remember that and look back upon that, and it would be a blessing, and that's what we're to do.

But anyway, they respond, no, they lacked nothing when they went out without anything. And He said to them: but now, let him who has a purse take it along. Likewise, also a bag, and let him who has no sword sell his robe and buy one. So there's a complete reversal of all of the instruction that He gave them here. And it reminds us that we must be careful how we apply this mission in Mark chapter 6 to our own day. It's clear that a set of rules and conditions in one period of time do not necessarily carry over into a later period of time. And that not only applies to the instructions given about personal provisions and clothing, but also regarding miraculous power. It simply does not follow that because the Lord gave His disciples

power to do miracles, that He has given the same power to the church today. Conditions change. And with that change can come a change in instructions, and a change in specific provisions for the ministry.

I don't want to labor the point, but those who would look to this passage or similar passages to claim miraculous power for the church today should be consistent and apply the whole passage to their situation. That means take no provisions when they travel. And as Matthew records, not acquire gold or silver or copper. But people tend to pick and choose, and they want to take the miracles for the present and leave the privations to the past.

Well, having said that, this mission has application to us in principle. It reminds us of the urgency with which we are to approach our Christian ministry. The devotion with which we are to engage in it, and the trust that we are to put in the Lord. We are to lean completely upon Him in all that we do. We are to be obedient and look to Him for our needs. And as we do that, we will enter into the high adventure of the Christian religion. That's what the apostles were to do. And the Lord indicates in verse 10 that God would provide for them providentially through the hospitality of others. And He gives them instruction on this. There would be people who would invite them into their homes. And with these people, they were to stay until they left that particular town. The standard for accepting hospitality was not the comfort of that house, but rather, it was the spiritual interest of the host of the house.

Now, they wouldn't be the recipients of a hospitable reception wherever they went. They would meet with resistance, and they should expect that. And their response to those who rejected them is set forth in verse 11. They were to leave, and shake off the dust from the soles of their feet for a testimony against them. That was a symbolical act that was very familiar to the Jews, because it was practiced by them in regard to Gentiles and Samaritans. To them, the very dust of Gentile lands was unclean and defiling. And so, when they were returning from abroad, preparing to reenter the land, a pious Jew would remove from his feet and his clothes, the dust that had accumulated from the Gentile lands in which he had been. He would remove the pollution of those places. And in doing so, it would be a gesture that he disassociated himself from the Gentiles, and from the judgment that would come upon them. It was a familiar gesture that the Jews in these various villages would understand. And so,

this act by the disciples would be a testimony to those who had rejected the gospel. They are like the heathen, and they are under the same judgment to come.

The message of the gospel always carries with it judgment as well as salvation. Salvation is for those who believe. Blessing always follows faith. But judgment always follows unbelief. Unbelief deprives a person of God's blessing.

The concluding verses describe the mission of the twelve, we read in verses 12 and 13. " They went out and preached that men should repent. And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them." So, the disciples went out in faith, and they succeeded in all that the Lord sent them to do, because God gave them the success. He will do the same for us as we live by faith. He will give order and peace in our personal lives, in our family lives. He will give true success in His churches when they are faithful to Him, when they act in faith. Faith is blessed.

But, a life of faith calls for diligence. It calls for a conscientious life. And the kind of diligence that comes with a proper sense of the urgency about our Christian mission. And our Christian lives. And the two can't be separated, because our mission is our life, and our life is our mission. But for our Christian life to progress, and to develop, Christ must be at its center. He must be the focus and the interest of our thoughts, and must be the focus and the interest of our church.

So, as we come to the end, when we conclude, we should ask ourselves a question: is He? Is He the very focus of our life? Is He the one whom we love and want to follow and want to serve, or have we become enamored with other things? Have we become so familiar with our Lord that it's really become a bit dull and tedious to reflect upon Him, to take the Lord's supper on Sunday night, to study His word throughout the week, to pray? Well, it can happen. That kind of condition can settle in on a well-instructed church, and the lives of well-instructed Christians.

But, there is a solution. Remember from where we've fallen, and repent, and do the deeds we did at first. Look to the Lord in prayer, and ask Him to forgive us for our indifference, and seek His blessing. And, blessings will certainly follow. May God help each of us to do that, to avoid the danger of becoming familiar without faith. And, as we conclude, it may be that there are some in our congregation who are familiar with Christ, yet without faith, and are in danger of taking offense at Him, as did the people of Nazareth. Well, guard against that. Seek Him out in faith. Don't

deprive yourself of the blessing that as those people of Nazareth did. Turn to Christ as the Savior of sinners, the one who died for the sinner who believes, and saves him or her eternally. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

[Prayer] Our gracious heavenly Father, we thank You for the love that moved You to send Your Son into an unreceptive world, a hostile world, a world in unbelief. And yet, in Your grace, You purchased a people for Yourself, and Your spirit has moved upon them to bring them to the knowledge, the saving knowledge of Your Son. We thank You for that because we look at this passage, and we should be reminded that we're no different than these people of Nazareth. But by Your grace, we have believed, and we thank You for the work that You've performed within us, and pray that it would continue and that You would make us men and women who go out with the power of the gospel, proclaiming it as these disciples did, as people who believe, and people who enjoy and experience Your power. It comes by Your grace. May we be good stewards and good ambassadors of that grace in all that we do. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.