

**BLIND UNBELIEF**

Mark 6:1-30

**Intro:** I have chosen this rather lengthy text because it seems to me that these thirty verses are united by two groups. On the one hand we see the spiritual blindness of the Jews in the synagogue in Nazareth along with the same evidence of spiritual blindness in Herod, the son of Herod the Great who is the Herod referred to as “the king” when our Lord was born in Bethlehem. When he died his son, who is the Herod spoken of in the Gospels, was appointed tetrarch over Galilee and Perea. As we learn from our text here in Mark 6, he was the one who had John the Baptist beheaded. But he demonstrated also that he did not know who the Lord Jesus was. He feared that our Lord was John the Baptist who had been raised from the dead.

By way of contrast here in the first part of Mark 6 we see the Lord’s blessing upon His disciples in the very powerful ministry that they had, and how they reported their work to the Lord, as we are told in verse 30.

As the chapter opens we see that the Lord had gone back to his home town in Nazareth and that on a certain Sabbath Day He was teaching in the local synagogue. This is the first point in the chapter.

**I. THE LORD IN THE SYNAGOGUE IN NAZARETH** (Mark 6:1-6).

He was teaching the Jews who were in the synagogue. His disciples were with Him. The Lord was given this opportunity because he was well known in Nazareth, having been raised in that city. It was like a person today going back to preach in his home church. And Mark tells us that as the Jewish people heard Him, they “were astonished.” It could be translated *amazed!* But the verb is intensive, so it means that could not get over what they were hearing, nor could they understand how this carpenter’s son (which they considered him to be) could be teaching such great things, or how He could perform such miracles. Instead of thinking that there might be a very important difference between Him and the other members of His family, they could not get beyond the fact He was a member of one of their families. That is as far as they got in trying to understand how He could teach like He could, or how He could perform the miracles which He did.

That is as far as multiplied millions of people have gone. They may have

been impressed by our Lord's teaching, and even have believed that He did perform many miracles, but that is as far as they go! They were "astonished" by the Lord, but He marveled at them. And He spoke of their problem as "unbelief." They enjoyed His teaching, and they could not deny His miraculous works, but that along did not bring them to believe Him, to trust in Him. They did not believe in Him. And they could not believe in Him because man does not have that ability. Faith comes, the Bible tells us, from hearing the Word of God. But it is only as the Holy Spirit enables us to understand the meaning of Scripture, and it is only the Holy Spirit Who even gives us that desire.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 2:14 that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." And in that same second chapter of 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul, speaking by the Holy Spirit, said that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (1 Cor. 2:9). People can see that some people have been changed for the better. They can read about the Gospel in the Bible. They have heard other say how desperately we all need to trust in Christ. But they don't get it unless the Lord enables them.

Just this past week in my Bible reading I read those words of the Lord Jesus Christ in which He made what I am saying perfectly clear. Listen to what He said:

44 No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day (John 6:44).

So, if you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, go to Him in prayer, and ask Him to make this truth clear to you, and to enable you to believe in Christ as your Savior. If the Lord's teaching and His miraculous works, did not show that He was the Son of God, then those in the synagogue should have asked themselves, Why didn't His mother do these works and teach like He did? Why didn't His brothers teach like He did, and do works like He did? And what about His sisters?

You see, we were all born in sin, spiritually blind to our condition before God, and spiritually blind to the work of the Savior. Only the Spirit of God can give us eyes to see and understand, and ears to hear.

But let us move on. The next thing that we read about is:

## **II. THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE (Mark 6:7-13).**

We see the charge that the Lord gave to them in verses 7 through 11, and then what the twelve disciples did in verses 12 and 13. (Read.)

The Lord has not given His servants today the same kind of power that He gave to the twelve in those days, and if anyone claims that He does, that person is not telling you the truth. I have no question but that the Lord still heals diseases. If He didn't, you and I would not be here today. Even before the NT was completed, the power for the apostles to work miracles was beginning to diminish. Paul prayed about his own thorn in the flesh, but the Lord did not take away. He left Trophimus at Miletus sick. The Lord is full of compassion. The miracles show that. But the purpose of the miracles was to draw attention to Christ, not to the twelve. And from what the Lord told the disciples to do, and what they did, we can see that their preaching was the main part of their work.

Notice verse 11 about *hearing* the disciples.

Then see in verses 12 and 13 and what part of their ministry was placed first. They went out, and what did they do? They preached. What did they preach? They preached that men should repent. Repent of what? People were to repent of their sins. Why? It was that they might be forgiven, and saved! To whom did they repent? Was it to the twelve disciples? Absolutely not! We repent to God, and we believe in Christ, trusting Him Who died on the Cross, believing that He died for our sins. He took our place in order that we might share in His place before God.

And what a joy it is when any of us have the privilege of having even a small part in telling people about our Savior, and then having the joy of seeing them come to faith in Christ. We proclaim the message, but the work of salvation is God's work.

At this point a third change takes place in the chapter. It had to do with:

## **III. THE EFFECT OF THE DISCIPLES' MINISTRY HAD UPON HEROD, THE TETRARCH (Mark 6:14-29).**

We are now going to learn about something that had already taken place, but no mention has been made of it before by John Mark in this Gospel. What was it? It was the John the Baptist was dead?

We are startled. How could that be? He was so greatly used by the Lord. Many lives were touched and changed by the Gospel message. How did he die, and why did He die?

Well, he was beheaded. Next to death on the Cross, this was probably the most ghastly way of dying. Why did he die? He died for preaching against sin. Who killed him? An executioner killed him. Was he given a trial? No. Herod just gave the order after a woman asked to have his head. Who was the woman? It was Herod's wife. Why did she want the head of John the Baptist? Because John had told Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. And that is what Herod had done. It made Herodias, his wife, so mad that she wanted to kill John the Baptist but Herod would not let her do it. Herod feared John. He knew that John was a righteous man, and holy. And he often heard John gladly.

Now you know that when John the Baptist talked to Herod, he gave him the same message that he had given to thousands of people. It was, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). And as the Lord began His own ministry, John the Baptist preached, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29) which meant that the Gospel was for Gentiles like Herod just as much as it was for Jews. Herod was attracted to John and to his message, and so he must have been interested also in hearing about Jesus. But Herod didn't do anything about the message that John the Baptist must have given to him many, many times.

But there was one person to whom Herod did listen. He listened to his wife. And she demanded that Herod arrest John and put him in prison. This Herod did.

But while John the Baptist was being held in prison for warning Herod that he had sinned by marrying Herodias since she already was married to his brother Philip, the calendar rolled around to Herod's birthday, and he gave himself a big birthday party. He invited all of his lords, captains, and the chief men in his government to this gala occasion. During the celebration Herodias' daughter danced before the whole group, and it so pleased Herod that he wanted to give her whatever gift she wanted, as he said, "Unto the half of my kingdom," which meant that she could ask for whatever she wanted, and he would give it to her.

She went to talk to her mother about what she should ask, and her mother

without any hesitation, said, “The head of John the Baptist.” Now anybody could tell from what Herodias said that she was a gruesomely wicked woman. She was determined that she was going to make John the Baptist pay for what he had said about their marriage.

The king immediately regretted what he had promised to do. But because he didn't want to break his promise, especially with all of the dignitaries who were there, he sent an executioner with the command that he bring the head of John the Baptist. The executioner went immediately, and came back with the head of John the Baptist on a platter, gave it to the dancer, and she gave it to her mother.

Can you imagine anything as horrible as that must have been? Herodias' daughter was just as bad as her mother. But we are learning here in Mark 6 that the story did not end there. We don't know how long before Herod heard about the preaching of the twelve disciples that he had killed John the Baptist, but I think that we can say that he had not had a peaceful day, nor a good night's sleep since. And so what did he think the disciples were preaching about? He thought that this glorious One they were preaching about was John the Baptist raised from the dead!

This tragic in more ways than one, and I am sure that when we get to heaven we will not find Herod there.

As I read this account, I am reminded of a word that Moses gave to the two and a half tribes that had asked for their inheritance be given them on the east side of the Jordan. The Lord promised that the tribes of Reuben and Gad and a half of the tribe of Manasseh could inherit the land east of the Jordan if their men would stay with the other nine and a half tribes until they had claimed their inheritance west of the Jordan River. But then the Lord gave them this warning:

20 And Moses said unto them, If ye will do this thing, if ye will go armed before the LORD to war,

21 And will go all of you armed over Jordan before the LORD, until he hath driven out his enemies from before him,

22 And the land be subdued before the LORD: then afterward ye shall return, and be guiltless before the LORD, and before Israel; and this land shall be your possession before the LORD.

23 But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the LORD: **and be sure your sin will find you out** (Num. 32:20-23).

Time would not erase the sin of Herod from his mind and heart. Neither

would busy-ness, or seeking to compensate for the bad with good. What does that Gospel song tell us about cleansing from sin? “What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus.” We can be sure that Herod had heard the Gospel. He had probably heard it many times from the lips of John the Baptist. But it is clear from Scripture that he never did anything about it. And at the preaching of the disciples, his mind turned, not to Jesus Christ, but to the possibility that John the Baptist had been raised from the dead.

Some day John the Baptist will be raised from the dead, but it is not the death and resurrection of John the Baptist that will atone for the sins of Herod. Forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life come through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Who died for the sins of those whom the Father had given to Him. Herod knew this, but he never believed it. No man on earth, including Caesar, would have held Herod accountable for what he did to John the Baptist. That was not his only sin, but it was probably his worst sin. The only sin that was worse, was the sin of not believing in Christ as his Savior. If he had only sought the Savior, the Lord Jesus would have given him life and faith in the sacrifice Jesus made for His own on the Cross.

We would be surprised to know how many people, well-known people in the world, have heard the Gospel, but have not obeyed the command to seek the Lord and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Back in 1774 a man by the name of William Cowper wrote a hymn which begins with the words, “God moves in a mysterious way His wonders to perform. The last stanza of that great hymn begins with the words I have chosen as the subject for my message today. It is this: “Blind unbelief is sure to err, and scan His work (God’s work) in vain.” The people in the synagogue of Nazareth said what they said about Jesus Christ because they were spiritually blind in their unbelief. And that was Herod’s problem. I pray that the Lord will not let anyone here make that tragic mistake. Don’t mistake knowing about Christ as being the same as knowing Christ. Knowing about Christ will not get you to heaven, but knowing Christ will. If you don’t know Christ as your Savior, seek Him now. Seek Him with your whole heart. Seek Him humbly. Seek Him now while there is still time to find Him. Ask God to save you from your sins.

But I still have one brief point to make. It has to do with:

#### **IV. THE REPORT THE DISCIPLES GAVE TO THE LORD (Mark 6:30).**

After this digression dealing with Herod, the disciples are back. They have returned from their mission.

What did they tell the Lord? Did they tell Him how big the crowds were to whom they spoke? Did they tell Him how many people they had seen who turned to Christ? No, it was a very different kind of a report from the reports that we hear about today.

Verse 30 tells us what their report contained. They told the Lord what they had done, and what they had taught. They had done what He sent them to do, and they taught the truth that He had taught them.

There are plenty of people who claim to be serving the Lord today who are doing what they think the Lord's work ought to be, and they are teaching any and everything but the Gospel of Jesus Christ. What would your report look like if you were giving your report to the Lord? Would you have to say that you haven't done anything? Or would you dare to say that you have found a better way than God's way? How wonderful it would be if we could all say, "Lord, I have just done what you have told me to do, and I have delivered the message which you gave me to deliver.

**Concl:** As most of you know, I have been in the ministry for over fifty years, but I have never yet saved a single person, and I don't ever expect to save anyone. I hope that the Lord has used me to do what John the Baptist did when He said about the Lord Jesus, "Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world."

But you will notice that in the report of the disciples doing God's will preceded preaching His Word. They had been given the power to perform miracles, but what made their ministry effective, glorifying to God, and a joy to themselves, was their personal obedience to His Word. May the Lord enable us to be faithful in living for Him, obeying His Word, doing His will, that we might be more effective in preaching His Word, telling others about Him Who came to seek and to save those who are lost. Once we, too, were in blind unbelief. But now we see, and we believe. May the gratitude we feel in our hearts for what the Lord has done for us, spur us on to tell other who are blind in their unbelief about the only One Who can open their blinded eyes so that they will be able to see.