

Psalm 48:1-2 Great is the LORD, and highly to be praised; in the city of our God is his holy hill.
Beautiful and lofty, the joy of all the earth, is the hill of Zion, the very center of the world
and the city of the great King. (48)

Introduction

The Christian life isn't easy. When I first became Christian, I was under the impression that the walk was going to be fun and light; I'd be that person whom everyone liked because I'd be so nice. So, as a new Christian, I read my bible daily, prayed, and journaled. I was clearly content and happy inside and out, which was the mark of being a true Christian. I was certainly happy in all things because my joy was in the Lord. Until I wasn't content, until I couldn't keep up joy and nice and easy. It took about two months before I realized that this was going to be harder than I thought. Happy fled in the face of internal conflict because I started to see the crisis of collision of myself, my faith, and the world. So, I hunkered down and read more, prayed more, journaled more, trying desperately to return to the pristine state of new-Christian where everything was easy and nice. I went to church as often as possible and took notes on every sermon. None of it worked. I'd try variations of this for years, even thinking that heading off to seminary was the thing: *Maybe if I figure it out, I'll get back my happy and easy.*

While some would say that I was trying to earn my righteousness through works (I won't deny that wasn't there), I think there was something else more profound happening. As I walked with Christ, my glasses were not obtaining to a darker shade of rose. Rather they were going clear, the lenses correcting my vision. I saw things...things I hadn't seen before. It turns out, the more I read, the more I prayed, the more I listened, the more my calcified heart gave way to flesh, the more my mind grew alert, unfettered by the shackles of chaos previously imprisoning it. I began to realize I couldn't accept things as they were, couldn't hold ideologies and opinions as I had, couldn't affirm those who I once could. Because of Love's love, I found myself in opposition to the status-quo and to those who upheld it. I couldn't stomach making money for money, I couldn't walk by people without homes and look the other way as if they didn't exist, I couldn't not see humanity in *all* people no matter what choices or deeds they'd made and done. 21 years out from conversion...Good Lord, the Christian life isn't easy.

Mark 6:1-13

And then while the Sabbath was happening he began to teach in the synagogue and then many people listening were struck with panic/were shocked saying, "From where [did] this man [get] these things, both who [is] the one who gave wisdom to this man and power such as this being done by his hands?..." And they became indignant by him. And then Jesus was saying to them, "There is not a prophet without honor except in [the prophet's] native place both among [the prophet's] relatives and at [the prophet's] home."¹ (Mk 6:3-4)

After doing rather profound acts of divine intervention (restoring a man trapped by demonic presence and isolated to the tombs and drawing Jairus's daughter from the dead into new life), Jesus and his disciples return to Jesus's home. With news of Jesus's healings and deliverances trickling into

¹ Translation mine unless otherwise noted. Intentionally substituted the pronouns of the sentence with the subject.

Nazareth, Jesus's return was of great interest to his former neighbors, indicated by the invite to teach in the synagogue.² As Jesus is teaching the gathered crowd becomes *panicked* and *shocked* and eventually fall into indignation. The crowd responds to Jesus this way because Jesus's teachings and actions, and also because of the panic infused confusion over the source of Jesus's authority to do such as this.³ *Who gave him—the carpenter heir,⁴ the kid⁵ who used to run around this town—the authority to do such things?* To which Jesus responds: *a prophet has no honor in the prophet's hometown, among family, and at home.* Jesus, Love's love, is in opposition to those of his hometown.

As a result of their lacking faith in their opposition to him, Jesus is unable to perform as many miracles as in the other lake-side towns.⁶ As those who knew him when he was young box him in to a previous narrative, Jesus is prohibited from healing and delivering the people of his native place from sickness and ailments. He is being opposed and can only do so much. Mark concludes the section describing that Jesus was *marveling* and *wondering* because of their lack of faith. Mark pushes forward Jesus humanity:⁷ like the prophets of old, Jesus knows and feels the opposition of his people.⁸ No matter how much Jesus can accept things for what they are in wisdom and power, the

² R. T. France *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC Grand Rapids, MI: 2002. 241 "Reports of that mission, however, have continued to reach Nazareth, so that the return of the local prodigy (with his followers from the lakeside towns) is a natural focus of interest."

³ France *Mark* 242, "As in the synagogue in Capernaum (1:22, 27), the congregation are astonished by both Jesus' words and his deeds. The σοφία which impresses them is presumably discerned from the teaching given at that time, but the δυνάμεις must be those of which they have heard at second hand (cf. Lk. 4:23), unless the healing of the ὀλιγοὶ ἀρρωστοὶ mentioned in v. 5 preceded the synagogue teaching. The primary cause of the astonishment is not, the wisdom and miracles in themselves, but the question Πόθεν τούτω ταῦτα;..."

⁴ France *Mark* 242-3, "But Mark never mentions Joseph, and the absence of a father in 3:31-35...suggests that a simpler explanation is the traditional view that by the time of Jesus' ministry Joseph had died, and therefore featured nowhere in the story outside the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke; in that case he was simply not a part of the tradition known to Mark. The absence of Joseph's name [in v. 3], where members of the family are listed explicitly, supports this view. In that case Jesus, as the eldest son, would naturally have taken over the family business as ὁ τέκτων." And, "In a small village the τέκτων would need to be versatile, able to deal both with agricultural and other implements and also with the construction and repair of buildings. As such he was a significant figure in the village economy, probably also undertaking skilled work in the surrounding area. In this context, then, there is nothing derogatory in the term. The point is rather in its familiarity; the τέκτων is (or rather was, until his fateful visit to John at the Jordan) a reassuring symbol of normality, not the sort of person from whom you expect σοφία and δυνάμεις."

⁵ France *Mark* 242, "To the people of Nazareth Jesus is the local boy, and they know no reason why he should have turned out to be any different from the rest of his family."

⁶ France *Mark* 244 "Both evangelists [Matthew and Mark] attribute Jesus' 'minimal' miraculous activity to the ἀπιστία of the people of Nazareth, but Mark's οὐκ ἐδύνατο is bolder, in suggesting that not even the ἐξουσία of Jesus is unlimited. Mark often highlights the importance of πίστις in healing and other miraculous contexts (2:5; 4:40; 5:34, 36; 9:23-24; 10:52; 11:22-24), so there is no surprise in seeing the opposite effect attributed to ἀπιστία, but the description of Jesus as unable to work miracles is christologically striking, and is not greatly alleviated by the mention of the ὀλιγοὶ ἀρρωστοὶ who were the exception to the rule."

⁷ France *Mark* 244, "The mention of Jesus' surprise (only here in Mark; the verb is more normally associated with the crowds) further underlines the 'human' character of Mark's portrait of Jesus. It also highlights the contrast between Jesus' reception in Nazareth and the general popularity which he has come to enjoy in the lakeside towns."

⁸ France *Mark* 244, "In Mark, however, the saying is given in a fuller and more emphatic form, listing rejection not only in the πατρίς (as in most versions) and in his own οἰκία (as in Matthew), but also among his συγγενεῖς an addition which reflects the unhappy experience of 3:20-21, 3b 35. The specific use of προφήτης (in all the Christian versions of the saying) need not necessarily be more than proverbial; the rejection of prophets by their own people is a common theme of the OT."

hostility of those who saw him grow up—those whom he loved—hits him, and he is filled with astonishment. Love’s love is opposed by the beloved.

...and he began to send them two by two, and he was giving them authority [over] the unclean spirits...And then he was saying to them, “Wherever you enter into a home, you remain there until you leave from there. And if any place does not receive you and does not listen to you, depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet in witness against them.” (Mk 6:7, 10-11)

Jesus calls the twelve to him and then sends them out two by two. Before they go, Jesus gives them the authority to heal and deliver, the very authority that he himself has from God—the same authority called into question earlier. Mark designates the source of the disciples’ authority and power to do as Jesus did because the source of that power is not of themselves but from an *other*, the Christ, the son of God. Mark doesn’t specify for his audience where Jesus gets his authority because he’s already done so: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the son of God” (1:1). So, with the power and authority that Jesus has,⁹ the twelve are sent out in six groups of two to do the very thing Jesus himself was doing back in Nazareth.

However, as it is for Jesus, so it will be for Jesus’s disciples (all of them, past, present, and future). A hostile response to the disciples presence in towns and at homes (even not theirs) is completely possible and most likely probable.¹⁰ The reign of God is often in opposition to the kingdom of humanity; those who are called to herald the coming kingdom and presence of God among the people in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and who use words and deeds to bring forth such a reality will come into conflict with that which is normal and accepted and regular in society. Upheaval of divine proportions always brings with it a fracturing of the foundation of structures propping up the dominant group by the liberation of the oppressed.¹¹

The very message¹² and deeds done by the disciples in the name of Christ by the power of God¹³ in those neighboring towns and villages was not one of beneficent well-being of comfort and all is well.

⁹ France *Mark* 248, “The ἐξουσία τῶν πνευμάτων τῶν ἀκαθάρτων which was envisaged in 3:15 as part of the purpose of their being sent out, but which they have not hitherto had the opportunity to use, is now actually given (and will be effectively deployed, v. 13), even though 9:18,28-29 will remind us that there is no guarantee of ‘success.’ What has hitherto been a special mark of the ἐξουσία of Jesus 1:27; 3:11) is now to be shared with those who have been μετ’αὐτοῦ (3:14-15).”

¹⁰ France *Mark* 246, “The possibility of a hostile reception has already been demonstrated in Nazareth (6:1-6) and is further envisaged in v. 11. There is a basic conflict of interests, even of ideologies, between the kingdom of God and the norms of human society- An ambassador of the kingdom of God is called not only to a mission of restoration and deliverance, but also to a conflict...”

¹¹ I’m not advocating for colonizing other cultures in the name of Christ; rather when the gospel enters different cultures it should liberate people who are oppressed in those cultures and not be a tool for oppression (something that has been done historically as a result of western missionaries and evangelists). The gospel, Christ as word and deed, is not in opposition to culture of any type, but is in opposition to captivity and oppression. Also, it must be stated that we are not to force people to accept a certain cultural interpretation of the gospel, as in converting people to a western conception of the gospel.

¹² France *Mark* 250, “Even though not included explicitly in Jesus’ charge in v. 7, proclamation (κηρύσσω) is an essential element in the disciples’ commission (3:14), just as it is in Jesus’ own ministry (1:14,38-39).”

¹³ France *Mark* 250, “...the threefold ministry of preaching, exorcism, and healing which Jesus has already been exercising is now appropriately extended to the disciples.”

Rather, the disciples through their authority to heal and deliver people from oppression bring the judgment of God to the town favoring those held captive, bringing them life and liberty and making known to those who are complicit with oppressing God's judgment on such systems. So, yes, some would receive them and listen; some would not. When opposition came, they were to do as Jesus did among his own kin: walk on.¹⁴ Shake the dust from under your sandals and walk on. The judgment of God is on them¹⁵ as they oppose Love's love. The disciples weren't responsible for changing minds and hearts if those hearts and minds were in opposition to love; that transformation is God's. They were charged to love the oppressed, even if that meant loving the oppressed in another town.

Conclusion

Martin Luther writes at the end of *The Freedom of a Christian*, "Therefore there is need of the prayer that the Lord may give us and make us *theodidacti*, that is, those taught by God...and himself, as he has promised, write his law in our hearts; otherwise there is no hope for us."¹⁶ The Christian life isn't easy, even if it starts that way. As we are taught by God, through God's love being written on our hearts, our hearts hurt and break with pain, grief, sadness, and surprise because of opposition to love—hallmarks of those following Jesus out of the Jordan daring to see in new ways, speak in new words, and pulling forth new structures of the kingdom of God. In fact, it is hard for those who hear and see in new ways, who lean into Love's love, to affirm old systems and conceptions of normal.

You the beloved, grafted into God by faith in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, are new creations; no longer of the old world but of the new that is the reign of God and life for you and for all people. You too, beloved, see and hear and feel things not in the old way but in the new: through the eyes and ears and heart of Christ that are now yours through faith. The Christian life isn't easy, it is a burden and a blessing as we love with Love's love. As we endure the same opposition Jesus himself endured, all we can do is walk on, loving radically as we have been radically loved.

¹⁴ France *Mark* 250, "In Middle Eastern society the expectation of hospitality for visiting teachers is no surprise; They ought to be able to take it for granted. A reasonably extended stay is apparently envisaged. What is surprising is the clear expectation that there will be some τόποι (not just single households but whole communities?) where they and their message are not welcome. Even at Nazareth Jesus and his disciples had at first been welcomed, even to the extent of an invitation to teach in the synagogue. But the ἀπιστία which followed there is likely to be repeated elsewhere, and in such a case the disciples must be prepared to do what Jesus did at Nazareth, to move on and focus their ministry in places where they will be welcome. (Cf. Lk. 9:51-55 for another example of Jesus' acting by this principle himself.)"

¹⁵ France *Mark* 250, "For ἐκτινάσσω τὸν χοῦν as a gesture of dissociation cf. Acts 13:51 (compare Acts 18:6). The gesture is more fully described in Lk. 10:10-11. The rabbis shook the dust off their feet when leaving Gentile territory, to avoid carrying its defilement with them. Such a gesture serves εἰς μαρτύριον αὐτοῖς, a phrase which could suggest that it is intended to lead them to a change of heart, but which generally carries the negative overtone of a 'witness *against*' (see above 1:44), a witness for the prosecution (this implication is explicit in Acts 18:6). A community 'marked' in this way as unrepentant (v. 12) will be liable to judgment (note how this gesture in Lk. 10:10-11 is followed immediately by pronouncement of condemnation on unrepentant towns, vv. 12-16)."

¹⁶ Martin Luther *The Freedom of a Christian* vol 31 *Luther's Works* Minneapolis, MN: Muhlenberg Press, 1957. 276-7.