



Matthew 13:53–58

53 When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.

54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.

“Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?” they

asked. 55 “Isn’t this the carpenter’s son? Isn’t his mother’s name Mary,

and aren’t his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? 56 Aren’t

all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”

57 And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town and in his own home.”

58 And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Reflection

(Today's reflection is given by Craig Tubman)

Today Jesus goes back to his home town. He has been away for some time and has become both a hugely popular and an extremely divisive teacher. In just the last chapter of Matthew Jesus has spent his time teaching about the kingdom of heav-

en. He has told parables urging people to accept his word and let it take root in their lives. He has warned that on the last day there will be a great division with some being destroyed and some finding life. He has set expectations by aligning the kingdom of heaven with a mustard seed – that whilst small, will grow into a huge garden tree. And he has urged people to take him seriously for the kingdom of heaven is more precious than the finest pearl.

Jesus has been teaching more like a prophet than a rabbi and with the kind of authority that indicates that he knows, personally, the kingdom of heaven that he speaks so much about. And then here in verse 53 of chapter 13, Jesus comes home. Some would expect he'd come home a hero – classic story of the country boy who made

it big. But his reception at home is a little more Australian than American – that is, he is received with scepticism and envy rather than praise and worship. The question that his hometown reception hangs on is there in verse 54,

Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?

Does it reflect God's authority or something else? Matthew records that ultimately their scepticism of Jesus leads to a rejection of him and his words. The seed that is sown does not grow and flourish. And one fears that many in his home town will be separated out on the last day and thrown into the fire rather than into the barn (to use one of Jesus' previous parables).

It is Jesus' familiarity that leads to obstacles of faith. It is a refusal to believe God can work in the ordinary. 'God can't be working through you, we remember you from being a kid, you're a carpenter, you have brothers and sisters, we know your parents! You're too human, too familiar, too normal to be the mouthpiece of God.'

Jesus' response to this is interesting. He remarks 'Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honour.' This is clearly a reference to his hometown of Nazareth, a town that refuses to believe his authority is from God.

And yet in the broader context of Matthew, I can't help but think this conclusion encompasses not just Nazareth but the whole Israelite nation. For from chapter 15 onwards

Matthew will record the Israelite religious leaders challenging, rejecting and plotting the death of Jesus. The promise from God to Abraham all the way back in Genesis 12 was that through Israel God will do something to bless the whole world! Now that blessing has come! But the leaders of Israel are rejecting him. It seems like madness, but only in his own house is a prophet without honour.

This section finishes with Matthew recording that Jesus did not do many miracles in Nazareth because of their lack of faith. In some circles this verse has been interpreted to mean that Jesus' power was under the control of those who were in front of him. That is, their faith was what facilitated his power to heal. This interpretation has led to all sorts of teachings that say if

you want healing from God today, all you need is faith. If you have prayed for healing and it hasn't been given then you are the problem and all you need is more faith. This teaching is destructive, a distortion of Scripture, and not all helpful for the follower of Jesus.

It flows in some part from a misinterpretation of this passage. Jesus' capacity to do the miraculous was not reliant on the faith of those in front of him. We know this because many times in Jesus' life he performed miracles amongst those who did not believe, such as the feeding of the 5000, the stilling of the storm and the healing of the man at the tombs.

Instead I think this verse refers to the fact that miracles played no part in advancing Jesus' mission in the town of Nazareth. Je-

Jesus didn't want his miracles to turn into a circus sideshow, rather they were powerful declarations that the kingdom of heaven is breaking into this world and that Jesus is the one to listen to and follow.

In his hometown Jesus' miracles merely led to mockery and so the miracles were of no use. They were not leading people into a knowledge of God and towards his saving king and so Jesus stopped doing them.

Jesus' rejection in his hometown was in large part due to people being caught off guard by God's work in our world. God does extraordinary things through the ordinary. His Messiah was a carpenter from Nazareth, his victory over sin and the devil occurred on a Roman cross, his kingdom grows like a mustard seed.

Think

It's easy for us to want the next spiritual high or another word from God outside of Jesus but I wonder whether the life of discipleship glows most brightly in the ordinary moments of our lives. Where we have eyes to see God shaping our home life, our contentment, our daily repentance of sin and our thankfulness for his daily blessings.

Jesus is incredibly impressive. He is the LORD of all, he is the redeemer, the victor over death and the one who calls us into relationship with his Father. But by the standards of our world we may be fooled into misjudging him like his home town did all those years ago. Let us celebrate that

God meets us where we are at and leads us forward in lives of humble obedience.

Pray

Take some time today to pray and thank God for his goodness to you. Ask God that he may give you insight into how you may honour him with your words and actions in the everyday nature of the life he has given you.