

'He Could There Do No Mighty work.'- Mar 6:5

by G. Campbell Morgan

The sermon explores the unbelief of the Nazarenes and its causes, and draws parallels with modern unbelief, highlighting the importance of motive and the role of God in human life.

Scripture: Jeremiah 2:12-13, Matthew 11:20-21, Matthew 13:57, Mark 6:5-6, Luke 4:24, John 7:17, John 10:37-38, Romans 10:17, Hebrews 11:6, James 1:6

Topics: "Unbelief", "Acceptance of Christ"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan explores the profound implications of Jesus' second visit to Nazareth, where He could perform no mighty works due to the people's unbelief. He examines the reasons behind their skepticism, highlighting their familiarity with Jesus as the carpenter and their inability to accept His divine authority. Morgan emphasizes that their lack of desire to do God's will blinded them to the truth of Jesus' identity and power. He draws parallels to modern unbelief, suggesting that just as the Nazarenes were offended by Jesus, contemporary society struggles to accept the transformative power of Christ. Ultimately, Morgan concludes that true understanding and acceptance of Jesus come from a willingness to seek and do God's will.

Transcript

Mar 6:1-6.

MATTHEW and Mark tell the story of this second visit of our Lord to Nazareth. Luke records the first visit, about a year earlier, at the beginning of His more public ministry in Galilee. There is an evident difference between the two stories. On the occasion of the first visit He went to Nazareth unaccompanied by His disciples; on this Mark distinctly declares "His disciples follow Him." On that first occasion He wrought no miracle; on this He laid His hands upon a few sick folk and healed them. On that occasion, when with madness they attempted to cast Him from the hill, He immediately departed from the neighbourhood; on this, He seems to have tarried in the adjacent villages.

During the interval between the first and second visits His fame had grown, and His power had been yet more wonderfully manifested. But recently His mother and brethren had travelled together from Nazareth to Capernaum to dissuade Him from continuing His arduous labours. They said, "He is beside Himself," and for very love of Him they attempted to persuade Him to return with them to Nazareth, and to quietness; but He had declined to do so.

Now, just before sending out the twelve who had been with Him in preparation for their work, He returned to Nazareth, taking them with Him. Thus the men appointed to coming service, who since He had appointed them to be with Him for special training, had seen Him, in the exercise of His power, Master in every realm of human experience, now saw Him in a situation where "He could do no mighty work." It was a new revelation to them of His limitation. They saw Him in such conditions that all the power that had been so remarkably; manifest-spontaneous, victorious, and irresistible-was now inoperative. This also was part of their training.

Let us first attempt to understand the unbelief of the Nazarenes in its manifestation, in its cause, and in its effect; then in the light of that consideration, glance at some phases and manifestations of modern unbelief.

First then, the unbelief of the Nazarenes in its manifestation, its cause, and its effect. The story, brief as it is, reveals first, what these men knew of Jesus. They were attempting to reconcile that which was immediate with that which they knew of Him before this time. They were in His presence, facing what they had heard from Him, what they, had seen Him do, or more probably, what they had heard that He had been doing. Then they were thinking of Him, as they had known Him during those years in which He had lived amongst them.

They asked two questions. First, "Whence hath this Man these things?" and secondly, "What is the wisdom that is given unto this Man, and what mean such mighty works wrought by His hands?" The two words, "what mean" have been introduced by the translators. In all probability they are helpful, but we may substitute two others, and read thus: "What is the wisdom that is given unto this Man, and what are such mighty works wrought by His hands?" That .carries the real thought of their question more correctly to our minds.

There are two questions. "Whence hath this Man these things?" Secondly, What are these things? What is the wisdom, and what are the works that He is doing?

The questions which follow reveal the reason of the first two. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joses, and Judas, and Simon? and are not His sisters here with us?"

All this story is perfectly natural, tragically natural! Nazareth was a town 4 probably of about ten thousand inhabitants, one of those towns where every one knows every one else, and every one knows every one else's business, as a rule a little better than people know their own business! So they said of Jesus; this is the carpenter; the Man we know so well; His mother, and brothers and sisters are here with us.

We will now invert the order of our consideration, coming secondly to what they mentioned first. What did these men know of Jesus? They knew first, that He was one of a most ordinary family in Nazareth. They knew His brothers, they knew His sisters.

They knew also that He was "The Son of Mary." When He visited Nazareth a year before they did not say that. Then they said, "Is not this Joseph's Son?" Now they said, "Is not this the carpenter, the Son of Mary?" While not daring to dogmatize at this point, I am going to suggest a question. How much of suspicion and contempt may have lurked behind that particular description of Him? I do not think there can be any careful reading of these narratives, without recognizing that there were those who fastened upon Jesus an insufferable and intolerable stigma. There was another occasion upon which He was speaking of His Father, God, and the Father of the men by whom He was surrounded. They said unto Him-and there is

the accent of a great satire and bitterness in it-"We were not born of fornication." I believe the sword that pierced through the soul of Mary was partly the fact that she also had to share the tragedy of misunderstanding, in the presence of the most infinite Mystery in all human history.

Then they knew Him as "the carpenter," the Man to Whom they had gone when they had required that yokes should be repaired, or ploughs refashioned; the carpenter Whom they had employed to attend to their houses, and probably to build them. These were the things they knew about Him.

But they now knew other things about Him, They knew that He was a worker of powers. It was impossible to deny it. They admitted it.

Perchance His working of powers was but the report which had come from other places, but they knew Him as a teacher of wisdom. On that very Sabbath they had listened to Him once more, and were amazed at His wisdom.

Now look carefully at the story. Observe their mental activity in the presence of what they knew, and their consequent mental attitude. I have already drawn attention to the fact that they asked two questions, and we want to understand them. They said, "Whence hath this Man these things?" Whence hath this Man what man? This Man we know so well, Whose brothers and sisters are with us, the carpenter, the Son of Mary; this Man Who has lived in our town, by our side. We have observed no halo about His brow, no sign of supernatural glory; He is one of ourselves; whence hath this Man these things? Now mark the second question. What is this wisdom, and what are these works?

Lurking beneath these questions was a suspicion, which ultimately became a conclusion, that the wisdom which had amazed them, and the works that had filled them with astonishment, resulted from His complicity with the underworld of evil. The wisdom was patent, the works were evident! How did He get this wisdom; how did He do these works? They said in effect; They are not His own, these works; the wisdom He utters is not His own. What is the secret of it all? Had they decided that the secret was that of His fellowship with God, that He was an instrument of God, that God was working mighty works through Him, that God was giving Him the wisdom which fell from His lips, then they had not been offended in Him. They were offended in Him because they came to the conclusion that He was in complicity with the underworld of evil.

This was no new thought. It had been declared before. There were those who affirmed that by the Prince of the demons He cast out the demons; that He was in very deed an instrument of the underworld of evil. Now in Nazareth we detect the same line of thought, and the suspicion suggested by the question became their conclusion. "They were offended in Him,

We come now to consider the cause of their unbelief. What brought them to this decision? The solution is not far to seek. It may be found in the words of our Lord upon this occasion, and in words that He uttered upon a similar occasion in Jerusalem, not to His fellow townsmen, but to the men of light and leading who were face to face with the same problem. In order to understand this unbelief, I shall make my appeal to the words He spoke here, and to the words He spoke upon the occasion referred to, in Jerusalem.

"A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." These are words which we constantly quote, and therefore I need not tarry with them, but will take the ugly heart out of the centre of them, and say that Jesus affirmed that the reason for their unbelief was that of envy, of the difficulty of acknowledging the superiority over themselves of one of their own number. That

needs no exposition. We understand it so well. It is a part of humanity's inherent vulgarity, which persists through all the centuries, and is as powerful to-day as in Nazareth in the olden time. It is part of humanity's contempt for itself, in which humanity imagines that it thinks highly of itself; the inability to believe that the man who worked by our side could ever be our teacher. We know all about him, and therefore we cannot believe in him.

Observe then some implicates of this attitude as revealed here in Nazareth. First-and this is patent-its unreasonableness. There were the facts, the wisdom which they admitted, the powers which they acknowledged; but they refused the appeal of the wisdom and of the works. What reason was there in such refusal? Mark the falseness of the attitude. The only escape for them was that of attributing good to evil. These good things came out of evil. This wisdom, which they admitted, came from the underworld of evil. Yet listen once again to these men of Nazareth, and notice the reaction of their criticism upon themselves. He is one of us; therefore He is incapable of being an instrument of good! Mark how their criticism of Him, had they understood it, was condemnation of themselves. This man, who has worked by my side, cannot teach me anything. Why not? Because he is on my level. Then you can never teach any one anything. This man who comes from our village, cannot come back to our village and teach us anything. Why not? Because he is one of us. Then the whole community labours under the disability of being unfit for doing anything that in itself is great. Oh! these critics of Jesus in Nazareth! How tacitly and unconsciously they were confessing their own limitations.

But we have not touched the deepest note. It seems to me that Jesus was very tender and patient with these provincials. He did not say the deepest or profoundest or most searching thing there. He reserved it for Jerusalem. There came a time a little later on when He was in Jerusalem, and there in the midst of its light and culture and refinement, in Jerusalem as here at Nazareth, they asked the question, Whence hath this Man the letters, never having learned? In Nazareth, the little provincial town, they said, "Whence hath this Man these things?" But in Jerusalem they did not ask the question in that way. In Jerusalem they said, "How knoweth this Man the grammata, the letters?" As they might say to-day, Whence hath this man culture, never having been to Oxford or Cambridge, to Yale or Harvard? That is exactly the spirit of the enquiry. Oh, how it persists! There are some men preaching to-day who have to live in that atmosphere of criticism, and will do so, to the end.

But get behind their criticism, and see the marvel of it; that the Galilean Peasant Who astonished the Nazarenes, astonished metropolitan Jerusalem also, astonished them particularly in the realm of their own thinking. When Savonarola began to preach in Florence, people would not go to hear him, for they were offended at his Lombard accent. The people were living under the sway of Lorenzo de' Medici, in that wonderfully cultured age when Cardinal Bembo warned his clergy against studying the epistles of St. Paul, lest they should spoil their style! Dwight Lyman Moody beginning to preach in London, London was offended at his American accent. That is illustration by contrast. When Jesus went to Jerusalem there was no accent that marked Him as provincial. When Moody began to preach here, some people were offended at his grammar, or lack of it. When Jesus went to Jerusalem they said, "How knoweth this Man the letters, having never learned?" The Nazarenes and the men of Jerusalem, the provincials and metropolitans, were in the same difficulty. Whence? When Jesus accounted for the fact in Nazareth He said, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country." When He accounted for it in Jerusalem, He said: "My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me. If any man willet to do His will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it be of God, or whether I speak from Myself."

Now with that word of Jesus in mind, we leave these metropolitans, and go back to Nazareth, and ask, what was the cause of the unbelief? Mark this tremendous thing. Jesus said in Jerusalem that willing to do God's will, created the capacity for detecting the Divine authorship and authority of what He said. He that wills to do the will of God shall know! Perhaps Jesus never said a more daring thing than that. In that word He challenged the attention of men to the end of time, declaring that wherever a man is found who in his heart wants to do the will of God, when that man hears His teaching, he will know it as the voice of God. In that word there is involved a revelation of the cause of their unbelief. The central motive of life was wrong. These men were not living solely to do the will of God. That they were not doing the will of God is not the point. Jesus did not say, He that doeth the will of God shall know; but, "He that willeth to do" it. There is a man who is not doing the will of God, but he wants to do it, Christ said, I can reach that man with Divine authority. Christ did not say the perfect man is the one who will know; but the man who wants to be perfect. His appeal was to the underlying motive, passion, desire of the heart, however it might be crippled, broken, paralyzed; for if the desire be there, said Christ, I have that to which I can appeal; and he who has such desire is the man who will discover the authority of My appeal.

These men in Nazareth were without that desire; the central motive of life was wrong. Instead of wanting to do the will of God, they wanted to please themselves. Consequently they were blinded in their outlook and therefore were unbelieving.

Finally, then, what was the effect of their unbelief? Here we face at once the mystery, marvel, wonder, and solemnity of the whole meditation. "He could there do no mighty work." That is the paralysis of omnipotence. Why could He do no mighty work there? Because God was excluded from the central desire and motive of life; and as a result the men were degraded; when the light of His wisdom and His works flashed upon them, they loved the darkness, and hurried back into it, refusing the light, and so God was shut out anew. "He could there do no mighty work."

In this connection we find another of the most arresting statements of the New Testament. "He marvelled" not at their unbelief; but "because of their unbelief." Their unbelief was not the object of His marvelling; it was the cause of it. If you are inclined to think that is a distinction without a difference, I admit at once that there is a sense in which the unbelief itself was an object. But He marvelled not at the fact, but at the nature of it. Their unbelief opened up a far wider range; and when I read that He marvelled, He was astonished because of their unbelief, I begin to wonder over what area His thinking ranged, when His soul was thus astonished. Perfectly understanding the unbelief, He marvelled at it; knowing its genesis He marvelled at it; knowing its paralyzing power He marvelled at it.

I think there is a clear light on this in the Old Testament in one passage which, in some respects, has no relation to this, story. Jeremiah in one high and exalted hour of prophetic insight, said this most astonishing thing: "My people have changed their glory for that which doth not profit. Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid, be ye very desolate, saith Jehovah. For My people have committed two evils; they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." From that terrific passage in Jeremiah, take out once more the central word, that daring thought which assaults the soul, and almost makes it breathless. "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this;" be horribly afraid, ye very heavens, at this; be ye desolate in the presence of this!" He marvelled at their unbelief." It was God's astonishment in the presence of the unutterable and appalling folly of human unbelief.

The final effect of their unbelief was that He left them, never to return. Yet mark the discrimination of His grace. There were a few sick folk, whose longing eyes were fixed upon Him, and from whose hearts there came to Him an appeal, and He healed them! There He could do no mighty work; and yet so fine in its discrimination, and so quick and sensitive in its operation was the power of His infinite grace, that in the town hardened in its unbelief, paralyzing His own power, where there were weak hearts trembling toward Him, He laid His hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.

We turn from this meditation upon the strange story of Nazareth, and think of modern unbelief. I am at once halted by my term. Modern unbelief? We are to-day a little in fear of the word modern; indeed, we are a little inclined to pay homage to it. I am getting somewhat tired of the modern mind, and the perpetual burning of incense to the modern mind, this eager, fitful anxiety to accommodate faith's declarations, and the whole Biblical revelation to the modern mind.

What is the modern mind? What is the meaning of the word modern? Modern simply means of the present time; modernus, of the present time; coming from that very simple Latin word modo, which means just now. Sometimes it is translated, and suitably so, only; sometimes but. Supposing we substitute some of these words, the modern mind, the just now mind. That is better. We are getting nearer to the meaning! The very word, modern, contradicts the idea of finality. It has, moreover, very close association etymologically with other words from which it seems to be entirely severed at the present moment. Modern has very close association with moderate, and modest. We are apt to forget this sometimes.

However modern the mind may be, and however much we may burn incense to it, we need carefully to remember the continuity of some elements in men, and in the human mind. We need to remember the persistent place and importance of motive in mental activity. We need also constantly to remember that in all mental activity there is an alternative motive; the motive of truth, or the motive of casuistry. Behind that is the motive of God, or the motive of self. Thus the modern mind, and modern unbelief will be found very near akin to that modern unbelief of Nazareth.

What does modern unbelief know about Jesus? What are the established things from which neither faith nor unfaith can escape? There is first, the fact of the association of Jesus with persistent spiritual revolutions, secondly the association of Jesus with persistent, moral transformations; and finally the association of Jesus with persistent, material betterment. We name the name of Jesus. We remember it first as the name found in our New Testament. We then think of the name to-day, held in high reverence. From that first use of it by the men of Nazareth, until this latter use of it, it has had associated with it these things, spiritual revolutions, moral transformations, material betterment of the people.

One other thing modern unbelief must acknowledge. All these facts are related to the Jesus of the New Testament. All the results which are so rapidly covered by the phrases, spiritual revolutions, moral transformation, material betterment, have followed where the Jesus of these Gospel narratives has been preached and known. These results are not due to the Church as an ecclesiastical organization. These spiritual and moral and material results are not due to the theologians. They are due to Jesus, to the Jesus of the Gospels. It is as men have read these stories, and have seen Him, have listened to these very words, that these things have happened; and that through all the running centuries.

Remembering these facts, observe the attitudes of modern unbelief. Modern unbelief admits the first three, spiritual revolutions, moral transformations, material betterment, but denies the fourth; it is busy denying these very stories of the Gospels.

But mark where that kind of unbelief is leading men. They are not making the blunder of the Nazarenes of attributing good to evil. It is too late in the day to make that blunder. Modern unbelief is seeking to reconstruct the cause; admitting these results, it is offended in Him. It takes Jesus and the Gospel stories, and says, No, no, these things cannot spring from such an One. The ground of its mental operation may be covered by declaring that on the one hand it denies all the supernatural elements; and on the other-and this is the very latest phase-it denies the natural elements. Modern unbelief says first of all, that these stories of the supernatural are not true. Then modern Unbelief is left to face facts without a sufficient cause, for if this Jesus be not as these Gospels represent Him-of our humanity, and yet other than our humanity, closely and intimately related in some infinite mystery to the Godhead and to our human experience, while yet for ever standing separate therefrom-if He be not the Logos incarnate, Man born of the will and power of God alone, then I am not surprised that modern unbelief says that these results cannot have sprung from such an One, and so comes at last to this final deduction, the denial of the natural, declaring that Jesus did not live.

Then what must unbelief do? Modern unbelief is seeking among the things of spiritual darkness, moral turpitude, and material degradation, for the things that change the darkness into the light, the turpitude into morality, and the degradation into liberty. Modern unbelief is face to face in that search with an impasse.

What is the effect of modern unbelief, wherever it asserts itself? This, "He could there do no mighty works." Modern unbelief without Jesus can work no spiritual revolution, and produce no moral transformation; and therefore in the long issue will produce no material betterment. All attempts to better the condition of humanity fail save as they are under the mastery of moral conceptions; and moral conceptions perish save as they result from spiritual inspirations.

We remind ourselves to-day, that His wisdom underlies all modern thinking, and His mighty works have moulded all modern history. That wisdom is found in the speech of Jesus as recorded, and in those very works in the presence of which men are stumbling to-day; in all that "He began both to do and teach."

We ask anew, Whence hath this Man these things? We affirm our belief in His own answer as John records it, both in regard to the teaching and the doing. Hear then these words of Jesus. "The very works that I do, bear witness of Me, that the Father hath sent Me." Hear Him again. "My teaching is not Mine, but His that sent Me."

Then, by the works and teaching of long ago; proceeding in their prevailing power through every successive century unto this moment; these being the things that inspire the best thinking of the age, and formulate its highest activities; by these things we affirm Him still, this Man of Nazareth, the Sent of God, and therefore the Saviour of the world.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/g-campbell-morgan/he-could-there-do-no-mighty-work-mar-65/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net