

# The Power of Unbelief

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[ 0 : 0 0 ]     Okay, anyway, good morning everyone, my name is Alan. I am one of the pastors here and it's an absolute pleasure and honor to be with you here today. Jesse, when he started today, said that there are a lot of great churches in the area proclaiming the good news or gospel of Jesus Christ and the fact you chose to be with us is really honoring.

We don't take it for granted. We are in part 14 of our series through the gospel or book of Mark and just to recap, this book was written by a man named Mark who is capturing and written for him the stories of Jesus told by the apostle Peter.

Peter, who was previously known as Simon, was one of the 12 disciples that Jesus chose to follow him and later on lead and expand the church after Jesus' return to heaven.

Thus, the title of this series is A Story of Discipleship, which answers two important questions that apply to all of us, no matter where you are. Whether you're here checking out who this Jesus is or if you've been a Christian for 50 years, it doesn't matter.

The questions are, who is Jesus? And then the second one is, what does it look like to be one of his disciples? Now, up to this point in our series, we have seen examples of Christ's authority in many different areas.

[ 1 : 1 4 ]     We've seen him heal the sick. We've seen him deal with demonic oppression and possession. We've seen him absolutely speak peace to nature and it follow. And then we've seen him raise people from the dead.

All of which are phenomenal miracles that blows, would blow your mind and blows our mind today. So when you add the great authority of his teaching into the equation, we see why the fame of Jesus has exploded.

And this is primarily around the area, around the Sea of Galilee during this time. And this is where his ministry has been focused, but things are getting ready to change. Today, we're going to look at another one of these incredible stories where Jesus decides to go back home again.

You see, the first time he went back, it didn't go so well. People had known him his whole life, but they accused him of losing his mind. Some of them accused him of being demon possessed.

I would say that was probably not the welcome home you and I would have anticipated if we had become a famous person. Probably would, you know, anticipate a big party, maybe a parade, I don't know.

[ 2 : 2 2 ]     Something like that. Some kind of recognition and celebration. Anything but absolute rejection. So let's see how it turns out this time and even dig into the reasons why he chose to go back.

We're going to be reading out of Mark 6 and the first 13 verses that should be on the screen behind me. So he went away from there, Jesus went away from there and came to his hometown. And his disciples followed him.

And on the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue. And many who heard him were astonished, saying, where did this man get these things? And what is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?

Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

And Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown, and among his relatives, and in his own household. And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

[ 3 : 29 ] And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

And he said to them, whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you, and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. And I would have to say, this story seems like a loss for Jesus.

He was rejected by his own people. All around the Sea of Galilee, it seems like people can't get enough of Jesus. He is blowing their minds with miracles and teachings, and people are becoming followers by the droves.

[ 4 : 39 ] Hundreds and thousands of people are following him. And yet he is hampered by his own people and their disbelief. I mean, he does teach, and that teaching blows their minds, and yet they can't get over the fact of the history.

They've known him his whole life. They know his whole family. And for the life of them, even though he is teaching and performing miracles, they experience crippling doubt.

I grew up in this area, mainly in Carteret County, and for the most part, everyone knew each other. It was a lot smaller a few years back. It didn't matter where we went as a family.

We would always run into people we knew. It's part of being in a small town. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing, unless you didn't want to be seen. You know.

Even today, when I see an old friend and tell them what I do, that I'm a full-time pastor, sometimes there is disbelief with the rhetorical question, really? You? You? The text says they were astonished at his teaching and wisdom, but that wasn't enough evidence to lead to belief.

[ 5 : 48 ] The Greek leads you to believe they stumbled over him. In other words, it was basically impossible for them to believe that their hometown boyhood friend could actually be the one, that he could actually be the Messiah, the promised one.

I must admit, when I have read this passage in the past, there wells up inside of me a sense of judgment against the people of Nazareth. You can't help but think down upon these people.

You and I that are Christians long to see Jesus face to face, and they grew up with him. They saw him. They heard him. They hung out with him. And yet they cast him out, not once, but twice.

Maybe the first time is kind of acceptable, but the second, really? I'm not sure his fame had grown exponentially around the Sea of Galilee and had not come to his hometown.

I mean, we're only talking about 20 to 25 miles difference between the Sea of Galilee and his hometown of Nazareth. Certainly people had heard and seen for themselves around that time, around the sea, and gone back home and told people.

- [ 6 : 54 ] That's not too, you know, big of a deal to think about. Now, truth is we easily look down upon these people. You and I, we look down upon these people because we read the Bible, and we know the whole story.
- But isn't it true that we all battle with unbelief? The truth is everyone battles with unbelief. This is not a great revelation, although it may offend some of us.
- Many of us have spoken boldly about our faith and how Christ has done this for me and done that for me and been here and done all those things and seen great miracles and all those kind of things. But if we are honest, really honest, there have been times of doubt and unbelief for us all.
- It's true for all people. Regardless of your religious beliefs, unbelief could be denying the existence of God or doubting his motives, doubting his timing, doubting his love, et cetera.
- All of us have doubted or experienced unbelief at some point. Let's just be honest about this. If Peter could deny Christ three times in the span of a few hours, I think it is feasible to believe we all have had times of unbelief or doubt.
- [ 8 : 12 ] The people of Nazareth have placed Jesus in a box due to familiarity. He was just a carpenter, which in that day meant they were kind of lowly.
- They were uneducated. They were down on the totem pole in the socioeconomic things. Nobody finds it easy to believe that some village child who has grown up beside him and whose undistinguished outside life he knows has turned out a genius or a great man.
- Unbelief can arise from different backgrounds too. Maybe you grew up in a Christian home and you've heard all these things several times before. They sound so familiar. As a non-Christian, it could be that you're trying to fit God into your paradigm.
- You will accept him if he does what you want without conditions. That one is a big stumbling block for many non-believers, and I would say new believers too.
- They want a savior. They don't want a Lord. The problem is Jesus bought us for the price of his own life. He paid a debt. You and I could never repay.
- [ 9 : 20 ] And because of that, he is both savior and Lord. There is no debate or bargaining or striking a deal with Jesus. He paid it all. You and I can't.
- Finally, unbelief can arise when we go through great difficulties in our lives. And when this happens, our response is normally as, Where were you, God, when I needed you? You were silent. I was crying out to you.
- Where were you? He was there. The ironic thing about today's world is if we do not affirm or believe in someone's stated identity, we are bigots and fear mongers.
- Yet, God has been denied and experienced more unbelief than all of us combined. Unbelief is saying God doesn't get to be who he says he is.
- Think about that statement for a second. Unbelief is saying God doesn't get to be who he says he is. We are, in essence, believing that God is a failure in some form or aspect of who he is.
- [ 10 : 24 ] We have convinced ourselves or have been led to believe that God is incapable. Unbelief is saying God doesn't get to be who he says he is. I believe that one major cause for some of us to doubt or have unbelief comes down to personal safety.
- If we truly believe in the message of Jesus, look at his life, then one could expect and anticipate some massive life change. It isn't convenient. It is oftentimes very uncomfortable, especially for close family members and friends who don't understand.
- I remember when I decided to leave my boyhood church. I had been there from birth to 26 years of age. And God told me to leave. He told me to leave to help start a new church.

Some of my friends and family members thought I had lost my marbles. That may be up for debate. I will admit that. But I just knew God had told me it was time to leave.

And it wasn't easy or convenient. I knew my church. I knew everyone there. I was well liked and could do no wrong in many other people's eyes. It was easy.

[ 11 : 31 ] But it wasn't where God wanted me. And I had to go. Remaining where I had been would have been much safer. And I would not have received so much grief. But I have not regretted that decision.

Some of us experience unbelief because we may actually be a bit selfish. What? Let's admit that if we really follow Jesus, there are things of this world we must say no to.

Those things are spelled out throughout the Bible. I would say the Ten Commandments are a great place to start. Look, every good parent, every one of you who are parents, you set out rules.

You set out boundaries for your kids. Why? Not because you're mean. Not because you don't want your kids to have fun and enjoy life. No. We do it because we know there are real dangers that can cause real harm.

Some of which can affect the rest of their lives. The same is true of God. He is a good father. We sing that song all the time. You're a good, good father. Right?

[ 12 : 36 ] And he knows the consequences of our bad decisions. Friends, we often say here that sin does not act like a bullet, only affecting one person. No. Sin is a bomb.

It affects multiple individuals, multiple families, friends, coworkers, neighbors, et cetera. If you're going to follow Jesus, then you need to realize that you don't get to live your life on your own terms anymore.

Jesus is king. We're not. I think also we experience a bit of sophistication, especially in first world countries like ours.

I think of that word and I think of, have a spot of tea with a few lumps of sugar, please. I don't know. I did say I just lost my marbles a few sentences ago. Okay.

All right. It is hard for many folks to reckon with and fully believe the claims that Jesus makes about himself. It was hard for people to believe that back then when he literally was with them.

[ 13 : 37 ] How much harder is that today? I mean, look at the level of education, the level of science, the medicine, the engineering, et cetera, that we have achieved as humans. We can understand and explain so many different aspects of life in great detail.

But I believe that with this great amount of knowledge comes with it equal portions of doubt and unbelief in God. Society today has convinced itself that we no longer need God.

He's a superstition. The fact is, unbelief isn't our problem to fix. It is God's. Isn't it funny that Jesus marveled at their unbelief?

The Greek word for marvel there means to gaze in wonder. The power of unbelief is strong and we need something bigger than ourselves to break it.

It would be foolish of us to think that Jesus expected everyone to believe. But I do think their lack of faith caused him to wonder. Wonder about what else would it take to cause their unbelief to become belief.

[ 14 : 40 ] It was here in Nazareth where Jesus grew up that he could heal only a few people. Why? Because they didn't believe he could possibly be a healer.

They could not accept that one of their own as being somehow greater than they were. Even if it meant forgoing the healing he could have brought them. Don't misunderstand what I'm saying.

Our lack of faith has no impact on the will of God and his ability to fulfill whatever he desires. He is God. He's going to do whatever he wants to whenever he wants to. However, Jesus heals many in one place and here in his hometown he only heals a few.

Living in unbelief leaves us outside of God's power because we are rejecting him. But there is hope. There is hope when we recognize that faith and humility, they do not travel without each other.

Which means we are called to humble ourselves and trust Jesus to be who he says he is and do what he says he can do. It is only after we know our need for him that trust in him soon follows.

[ 15 : 51 ] The fact of the matter is that this story, the story that Jesus went back home, well guess what? Guess what? He's in town.

He's in your town. He's in my town right now. Tell him about your burdens. Let him give you rest. By the way, it's you he came to see.

He came to see all of us, but he came to see you and I too. Amen. You and I who are full of doubt and unbelief, he came. Just because we may have unbelief doesn't mean we are off the hook.

There are real consequences for our unbelief. Sometimes we live with the false understanding that denying God is just a matter of personal preference. What is good for you is not good for me.

So that really doesn't matter. But the consequences of unbelief were major in two main areas. First of all, he could not do much work there. It was a limited number of miracles.

[ 16 : 56 ] And secondly, he simply leaves and moves on to another city. Jesus had given them everything they needed to see and believe. His authority was on display.

Miracles were performed, yet their hearts remained hard and calloused. You see, it wasn't that the power of Jesus was limited by their unbelief. He wouldn't exercise his power because they had no faith.

One theologian said it this way. Christ cannot save a man who doesn't trust in him. Jesus also uses their unbelief as an object lesson for his disciples.

Listen to the instructions he gives as he sends them out in verses 10 and 11. And he said to them, Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.

And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them. So, how would this work itself out in the ministry of his disciples?

[ 17 : 58 ] Firstly, they would stay where they were well received and leave when they were rejected. Because more signs and wonders will not win over a hardened heart.

Secondly, they were to shake off the dust that is on your feet, which is, that's pronouncing judgment on that town or that house. They were not to be offended. They were not to lose their temper.

They were not to be bitter in spirit. But to simply move on. They were to move on and leave the judgment to God, who we know is the better judge of things.

He is a much wiser judge. He's not swayed by emotion or offense. With this mindset of letting God be the judge, let us be the mouthpiece, with that mindset, we will keep our hearts soft and ready for the next opportunity of ministry.

We will be ready for the next town. We are not called to take offense and be offended by others' doubt and unbelief. We're not called to do that. We are called to respond like Jesus.

[ 19 : 07 ] Jesus goes after our unbelief with grace and truth. Think about this. It is hard, if not impossible, to be present for the next opportunity to minister to someone if you are stuck looking over your shoulder at the offenses of the past.

Even after they rejected him, Jesus, for a second time, he still went about the village's teaching.

Many of us would have liked the story better if he had cursed Nazareth and destroyed it with fire. That's a good retaliation story, you know, when I'd like to go see the movie. That's not how Jesus responded.

He's motivated by love and grace. You and I, if we're real with ourselves, we are motivated by justice. If we've been offended, we want justice.

You see, whenever God responds to unbelief, the catalyst is always grace. Now, grace is best understood as the unmerited favor of God. Therefore, God freely extends himself gracefully to you, even though you have done absolutely nothing to deserve it.

[ 20 : 32 ] The question we are left with is, how does this work itself out? One way is to understand grace. When we consider grace, there are normally two aspects in view.

There is the common grace of God and his particular grace. Common grace, particular grace. God's common grace is displayed when he sends rain on the just and the unjust.

It doesn't just rain at my yard and leaves my neighbor's yard alone. No, it rains for all of us. That is common grace. Particular grace is displayed when he changes our hearts to believe the gospel.

So, if you are mired in unbelief this morning, there is a reason you are here. The Father is calling you to turn away from unbelief and turn to his Son.

He has brought you here today for this exact reason. Therefore, I urge you to cry out to him, confess your sin, and believe the gospel.

[ 21 : 34 ] For in doing so, you have a perfect promise, which Jim Elliot declares very succinctly. He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. As the band comes up, if you are here or listening and not yet a follower of Christ, I would ask you to consider the story here today.

Consider how Jesus responded to those that doubted. He didn't respond with judgment and anger. He responded with grace and love. That same grace and love is present and available for you today.

Consider the cost of doubt and unbelief and the reward for accepting his grace. Consider the cost. There will be a prayer on the screen that is a simple prayer of recognition of your need and asking Jesus to help you.

It will change your life. It will change your eternity. If you're here or listening and a follower of Christ, I want to remind you of how grace has been extended to us.

[ 22 : 54 ] The reason we need to be reminded is that we often forget and then ungratefulness sets in. 2 Corinthians 4, 5 and 6 says, For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God who said, Let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Let's take a few moments to examine our lives and how are we doing in this area of unbelief.

Has God been asking you to do something or maybe speak to someone or go somewhere that you've been kind of pushing back? Not me, not now. Are you walking through a time of uncertainty wondering, How in the world am I going to make it?

I urge you to remember the faithfulness of God. Remember those times in your life when He was there. Remember those times when He was faithful and recommit to following Him.

He is a faithful and just God, quick to forgive. He's a good Father, as we said, and all we need is reminding and realigning our lives with His.

[ 24 : 17 ] Let's take a few minutes, just a few minutes, a few seconds to do business with God and then we'll continue on.