

Mark 6

by John Nelson Darby

The sermon explores the themes of Jesus' divine character, the rejection He faced, and the call for believers to exercise faith and compassion in their mission.

Scripture: Psalm 132:15, Matthew 14:14, Mark 6:1-6, Mark 6:12-13, Mark 6:30-52, John 12:26, Romans 5:8, Philippians 2:5-8, Hebrews 4:16

Topics: "Faith", "Divine Love"

Description

John Nelson Darby emphasizes the humility of Jesus as a manifestation of divine power, contrasting it with human pride and the rejection He faced from His own people. He highlights the importance of faith in accessing God's power, as seen in the miracles performed by Jesus and His disciples, and warns against the obstacles of unbelief. The sermon illustrates God's unwavering love and grace, even in the face of human rejection, and encourages believers to act in faith and share the gospel. Darby also reflects on the disciples' mission and the necessity of relying on God's provision, culminating in the miraculous feeding of the multitude. Ultimately, he calls for a heart ready to follow Christ, embracing the path of the cross.

Transcript

But however great His divine power, He was manifested in a form that could lend nothing to the pride and vanity of human nature. Man was responsible to receive Him because He manifested the character of the Godhead: He would not flatter and give support to human passions, nor to those of the Jews as a nation. If man is to receive God, he must receive what God is; but this is just what his fallen nature will not do. The divine character was much more fully manifested in the humiliation of Jesus, than if He had come as a glorious King; but He was not that which man's heart desired. He was the carpenter's son, and that was enough to cause His rejection. They judged according to the flesh: the kindred of Jesus were in their midst; and they did not look any farther. Astonished at their unbelief, He leaves them after having done that which the wants of some of them demanded, for His grace never failed. A prophet is not without honour but in his own country; for it is there that he is known according to the flesh. So it was with Jesus, not only in Nazareth, but also in Israel. Remark what an obstacle unbelief is to the exercise of the power of God. The faith of the sick woman who touches His garment causes His power to come out, but the unbelief of the inhabitants of His own country hinders its exercise. We find, "He could not do any mighty work there," etc. May God grant that we may not put any obstacle to the activity of His grace, which is always ready to act; but, on the contrary, may we know what it is to profit by His power by causing it to act towards us by faith; chap. 6:1-6.

256 Now the Lord sends His disciples to preach, and we have a proof of His power more remarkable than that of His own miracles. He gives them the power to perform miracles themselves, power to cast out all demons. This is a power evidently divine; God makes man capable to perform signs and wonders; but what man can give this power to another? Christ gave it, and His disciples, capacitated by His gift, cast out demons in reality: Christ was God manifest in grace upon the earth. We have already called attention to the fact that all the Lord's miracles, and those of His disciples are not only the results of power, such as the miracles of Moses, of Elias, etc., but they are the fruits of divine goodness. One may except the cursing of the fig-tree, but this after all is a proof of the same thing. The testimony of the Lord, stamped as it was with love, and confirmed by His miraculous works, had been rejected; and Israel - man's heart - under the influence of this goodness, of the manifestation of God, of all the care which God had lavished upon it, had not brought forth any fruit. Therefore the bad tree is judged for ever, so that it can never bear fruit again. Thus man, having shewn himself to be nothing but guilty, and so guilty, that all the means employed by God, even to the gift of His only-begotten Son, have been found to be unable to awaken a single good sentiment towards God, as to his state in the flesh, he is finally rejected of God. God can save him in giving him a new nature by the Holy Spirit, but in himself he is without hope. Who will do more than that which God has done?

More than this; the Lord has not only power to give to His disciples authority over evil spirits, but He can also dispose of human hearts. The disciples were to start without taking anything for their journey; and nevertheless, as we read in Luke, the disciples bore witness, in answer to the Lord, that they had wanted for nothing. Sustained by the power of Emmanuel, whose power extended everywhere, and armed with His authority, they were to stay in the house into which they had entered until their departure from each place. Thus they were to conform themselves to this mission; possessing the Lord's authority for their message, they were to act accordingly. And wherever their message should not be received, they were to shake the dust off their feet as a witness against that city, whose fate should be worse than that of Sodom and Gomorrha. It is true that the Lord, full of goodness and patience, sent seventy disciples again before His face when He went up to Jerusalem at the end of His career upon earth, and these were to preach the gospel. But as to the principle of the mission, that which we find in Mark was the last testimony given to Israel before the judgment of the nation. This was to be a last appeal to the conscience and heart of the people, in order that it might receive the Saviour and repent and turn to God and escape the terrible judgment that awaited it; and that there might be at least a remnant which, moved by the powerful word of God, might return to God to enjoy His goodness in the Saviour, and a better hope than Judaism had been able to give them.

257 The disciples went forth preaching that men were to repent. What grace there is in the sending forth of the gospel! Not only does God give us to enjoy salvation and His love, but employs men as the instruments of the activity of His love. O how we ought to bless God that He condescends to make use of us to carry the testimony of His ineffable love and of His truth to men's hearts - at least to their ears, in order that He Himself may cause it to reach their hearts in His grace! May we know at least what it is to have our hearts full of love, whether we preach or not, so that they may be a true expression of that grace which seeks men. Thus the power of God accompanied the disciples; they cast out devils and healed the sick.

At this time the report of the works and power of the Lord reached the king's ears; his conscience was troubled at it because he put John the Baptist to death. Here begins the history of the facts which shew practically the opposition of man's heart to the testimony of God. The enmity against the truth and the light

which was fulfilled in the death of Jesus, manifested itself already in the death of His predecessor. Herod's natural conscience had induced him to listen to John; the fear that he had of the holy man who had been faithful in rebuking him caused him to have some regard for him, and to keep him from the enmity of Herodias; but that which is natural is not enough to form a barrier to the flesh. The excitement of a banquet and royal pride are enough to cause the prophet's death. Painful instance of the manner in which man deceives himself; and when he imagines himself strong enough to shew forth his power, all he can do is to reveal his weakness and his slavery to his passions. All this does but accomplish the will of God; this enmity of man's heart must shew itself, and must introduce, by the rejection of John the Baptist and of Jesus Himself, things infinitely better, through the sovereign grace of God.

258 The disciples come back and relate to Jesus all that they have done and taught; it was natural that they should be full of it. But the Saviour does not say anything about it; for Him power was a natural thing, and He wishes the disciples to come apart in a desert place to rest a little in solitude. It is always a good thing, even necessary for us whatever the blessing may be - all the more the greater it is - for us poor creatures who are so incapable of bearing the effect of power when the work is by our means, so ready are we to attribute it to ourselves without perceiving it; it is necessary, I say, to retire into God's presence, and there in His presence to find out what we are in truth, to enjoy in safety His perfect love: but to be occupied with Him and not with ourselves. This is what the Lord did in His tender consideration for His own.

But the love of God does not find repose in this world; and man, finding but little love in human hearts, is afraid of wearying the Lord when He is present there; but divine love never refuses to attend to man's wants. The people recognised Jesus and ran together from every city, coming out of their solitude to see Jesus; and He, seeing this great multitude, was moved with compassion, because they were as sheep without a shepherd. He begins to teach them: this is the first and true need of the people abandoned of their human shepherds; but the Lord still thinks of all the needs of His hungry people. The disciples would have wished to have sent away the crowd, but Jesus wishes to feed it. This miracle has a great meaning in itself, from the place it holds in this Gospel. Jehovah was the true Shepherd of Israel and was there present in the person of Christ, who in truth was rejected. Nevertheless His compassion and His love were not weakened by the ingratitude of the people.

To shew that He is really Jehovah, He acts according to Psalm 132:15; "I will satisfy her poor with bread." This is a psalm which predicts the time of the Messiah, which will be fully accomplished in the latter days; but He who shall accomplish it was there present, and though He be rejected, He gives the proof that Jehovah has visited His people - He satisfies the poor with bread. His love was far superior to the malice of His people. He had already said that the Son of man would be put to death, and that the people would not receive their Saviour-God. With all this, Jehovah does not abandon His love; if the people do not want Jehovah, Jehovah wants the people. He gives the precious testimony that Jehovah's love does not grow weary, but remains superior to all the folly of man. May His name be praised and adored for it! We can all the more count upon His unfailing goodness not to allow us to fall into negligence, but to sustain us in our weakness; for His love is greater than all our failings, so that we can adore His patience.

259 But there is another important truth which we find here. The Lord does not say, "I will give them to eat," but, "Give them to eat." The Lord wishes the disciples to know what it is to use His power for the good of others, and that they may know how to use it by faith. Oh, what a thought that true faith employs Jehovah's power, and in circumstances which shew that His love is above our unfaithfulness and failure! How important a truth for us, that Christ is the expression of this love, of the superiority of God's grace

over all our sins; for "God commendeth his love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." This was the proof of it; but that which was manifested in His death is always true for us in His life. "Much more," says the apostle, "being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life." Faith, therefore, counts upon the un failing faithfulness of this love, and uses the strength which is made perfect in weakness. The flesh in the disciples sees nothing but carnal means, and does not look at God's love and power but at that which is seen. But the Lord gives food in abundance to the hungry multitude, and shews Himself to be both the God and Saviour of Israel.

The story which follows gives us the picture of the separation caused by the Lord's rejection, and the welcome which will be given to Him at the end of the history of this world which has rejected Him. He does not speak of the judgment of His adversaries, but of the change of the world itself. The Lord constrains His disciples to depart alone, whilst He sends away the multitude; and when they are gone, He departs into a mountain to pray. This is exactly what the Lord has now done: the disciples are tossed upon the tempestuous sea of the world; Jesus has sent away Israel, and has ascended to heaven to intercede for us. In the meantime the wind is contrary, and we toil in rowing with difficulty and trouble, being outwardly left to the Lord; but He intercedes for us always, and obtains mercy and grace for us in the time of need. Israel had been dismissed.

260 More exactly, the disciples upon the sea represent the Jewish remnant, which in fact has become the church: but here it is considered in its character of the Jewish remnant. Jesus overtakes the ship, walking upon the sea, for He can walk calmly upon circumstances which cause us great trouble. The disciples are afraid, but Jesus comforts them, assuring them that it is Himself, their well-known friend and Saviour. Thus it will be at the end of the times: Jesus will appear superior to all the circumstances by which His people are troubled; and He will be the same meek and humble companion who walked upon earth with His disciples "in the days of his flesh."

"Now when he entered into the ship, the wind ceased." I repeat that the judgment of His adversaries is not mentioned here, but that which will happen to His people amongst the Jews, when He shall return. Then the world will be again full of joy. The land of Gennesaret, which had sent away the Saviour after He had healed the demoniac, receives Him now and owns Him, and all the people everywhere enjoy His presence with delight.

Are our hearts ready to receive this teaching? Have we learned that to carry one's cross is the true position of the Christian, the path into which the Lord has led us? To walk thus we have need of an object which can rule the heart, which can possess its affections, and can fix them on what is on before, and lead them on; an object to which too the cross is united - that is, Christ who has loved us, and who gave Himself upon the cross for us; Christ who is now in glory to which He is leading us, and who shews us what the path of the cross is, in order that we may be with Him and like Him, following the path which the Lord has trod for us in His love. "If any man serve me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be."

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