

JESUS TAUGHT THE BIBLE TO HIS HOMETOWN PEOPLE

Matthew 13:53-14:12

Key Verse: 13:54

"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."

In this passage we read about two events. One is Jesus visiting his hometown to teach the Bible. The other is the story of how John the Baptist was martyred. Here we learn Jesus' wholehearted Bible teaching. And as a reward, he was despised and rejected by his hometown people. He was rejected not only by his hometown people, but also many other times in the chapters we have already studied. Jesus taught the Bible, and he was rejected and despised and misunderstood and persecuted. John the Baptist was Jesus' forerunner. In order to complete his mission from God he left his home, even though he was the only son of his old parents Zechariah and Elizabeth, and lived in the desert in order to prepare himself to be the forerunner of Jesus. Then John began his ministry and completed it. His reward from the worldly people was martyrdom. In this passage we learn from Jesus his eagerness to teach the Bible in spite of many hardships. We also learn from John the Baptist his absolute attitude toward his mission.

First, Jesus visited his hometown (13:53-58). Look at 13:53. "When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there." This verse tells us that Jesus taught the word of God until people could get a glimpse of the kingdom of God. For this, Jesus sometimes spoke to the people in plain speech, but they did not understand the secret of the kingdom of God. They only demanded the healing of their sick bodies and abundant food from Jesus. Jesus was almost pushed into the lake. So he jumped into a boat and taught the people from there. Since there were many thousands of people, Jesus could have pounded away at them. But he did not. Rather, he quietly taught them in parables. It is really surprising that Jesus taught many parables to the crowd of people instead of giving them a pounding message. It was because he had done all his best to plant the kingdom of God in their hearts, but they were carried away by their own demands. They never received his words. So he taught them in parables.

After teaching them in parables, he visited his hometown. Since he came to his hometown, he should have visited his mother and brothers and elderly people first, and given them many kinds of gifts. But Jesus did not give even a Big Mac and french fries to each person. Instead, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach the word of God. At first they were sorry that they didn't receive any gifts from him. But, in the course of listening to the words from his mouth, the people in the synagogue were amazed. His teaching the word of God was his best gift to his hometown people. And their amazement when they heard the word of God from Jesus was their jubilant joy. There are many kinds of amazement. But these days most people are not often amazed. At best, some are amazed by a baseball game, especially when they see Mark McGuire hit a home run, and see his record. In order to be amazed like this, they wait in line several hours to buy expensive tickets. This kind of amazement fades away when they come home dog-tired.

Jesus' hometown people's amazement was indeed great, for they were amazed by the mighty powerful word of Jesus and its wisdom from above. Their problem was that when they heard Jesus' words, they were not amazed from their hearts, but only their feelings were stirred. So such a precious amazement did not last a long time. A sincere medical student attended the first UBF conference. It was a very strange conference. During the daytime the attendants cried while hearing the word of God and said many "Amens." But at night they enjoyed the "Twist," which was the popular dance at that time. They danced until 3 or 4 a.m. So the conference was very funny. The daytime was full of "Amens" and snoring. The nighttime was like a devil's carnival. In spite of the conference atmosphere, this sincere medical student received John 15:5, "I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing." After the conference he came to his shepherd with many tears and shared his decision to quit medical school and become a full-time Bible teacher. But he ran away from UBF the next day. It was because he did not receive the word of God from his heart, but only with his feelings. Here we learn that we must receive the word of God from our hearts.

It is important to receive the word of God in our hearts. Once Evangelist Billy Graham went to Korea to visit the U.S. Army soldiers stationed there. After visiting them he spoke to the Korean people. His messages were from the Bible. One was "Jesus Heals Blind Bartimaeus." Another was "Jesus Heals a Man with a Shriveled Hand." His messages were not very special. His messages sounded like he was telling the Bible story exactly. But people's response was indeed great. One UBF shepherd discovered why Dr. Billy Graham became the greatest messenger in this generation. It was because he delivered the word of God exactly as it was written in the Bible passages. So UBF also adopted that Bible-teaching and message-writing method: Billy Graham's simple Bible-story-telling type of message. When many UBF people taught the Bible as it is, from their hearts, UBF grew and grew. Conservatively speaking, it has grown to be one of the top ten campus evangelistic and self-supporting world mission organizations maybe number one.

Jesus' hometown people said many "wows" and praised Jesus because of his wisdom and miraculous power of speech. But suddenly they were fed up with their own feelings and began to undercut Jesus by talking about his family background. Verses 55 and 56 say, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" What they said meant that Jesus might be some kind of magic artist. Their ill feeling got worse and with their ill feeling they took offense at him. The hometown people should have been happy that the Messiah was from their hometown. The hometown people should have been happy at his words and wisdom and spiritual power. At first, they genuinely heard the word of God and they were amazed. But then they saw Jesus humanly and became emotional and offensive.

Here we learn that even Jesus' hometown people despised and rejected him when he taught the word of God. Jesus taught the word of God to his hometown people until they were amazed. But the result was contempt

and offense. When we teach the Bible to our sheep in the best way, after much preparation, we expect a kind of good response. But we should not expect any good response or praise. We should prepare our hearts to overcome contempt and offense, and rejoice in the Lord, believing that we did what we should do.

Second, Herod the tetrarch's distress (14:1,2). Look at 14:1-2. "At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to his attendants, This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'" Herod the tetrarch was one of the sons of Herod the Great. Before his death, Herod the Great divided his empire into three parts and gave them to his three sons. Herod the tetrarch ruled over Galilee and Perea, the areas in which John the Baptist and Jesus had done most of their work. Herod the tetrarch was one of the territorial kings of Israel under Roman rule. So he should have had an awesome appearance because of his power and authority as a king. But he did not. Herod was extremely sensitive to public opinion, especially to a rumor about Jesus. He felt that Jesus was a reincarnation of John the Baptist whom he had killed. This was the reason that Herod the tetrarch was unbearably distressed.

When Herod heard the reports about Jesus, he wasn't happy. The reports about Jesus disturbed him, and then drove him into mental disorder. In his hallucinations, Herod thought that John the Baptist, whom he had killed, had risen from the dead. He said to himself, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! I killed him, but he rose again!" Ever since he had beheaded the righteous man John, Herod felt as if John's headless, bloody body was chasing after him. Herod was like Cain, who was a slave of a guilty conscience and sense of punishment.

Third, Herod's immorality brought forth violence (3-12). In verses 3-12, the author tells us the whole story to explain the cause of Herod's distress. According to these verses, Herod's immoral life was the main cause of his self-destruction. Herod took Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, and enjoyed sinful pleasure with her. But when John the Baptist heard about Herod's immoral life and injustice, he rebuked him sternly, saying, "It is not lawful for you to have her." At first, Herod received John's rebuking humbly. Mark 6:20b says, "When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him." So Herod had no idea to put John to death, partly because his conscience was pricked by a guilty feeling, and partly because he was afraid of the people, who considered John a prophet.

Then something bad happened. On Herod's birthday, Herodias, who had harbored a grudge against John, made her daughter dance for the royal guests and subjects. Her intention was to win Herod's favor so that she could satisfy her malice by the premeditated murder of John the Baptist. When Herod watched Herodias' daughter dance, he was so fascinated by her dancing that he made an oath, "I promise to give you anything you want." It was a fatal blunder in a drunken state. Satan lost no time. Satan came into Herod, channeling through his blunder. As soon as Herod's remark was made, the girl said, as she was prompted by her mother, "Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist" (8). Herod was startled by such a request from a pretty young girl. The king's heart sank. But in order to maintain his prestige before his

subjects, Herod ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison (9,10). John's head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. Here we learn that immorality produces violence. We also learn that an immoral woman can be as nefarious and vindictive as Ivan the Terrible. Immorality is not a small matter: It brings upon anybody unbearable punishment in the end. An immoral life is not fun. It is the starting point of destruction for oneself and a nation. The Roman Empire was a good example.

Fourth, John the Baptist completed his glorious mission. It is necessary to think about John the Baptist. He was called by God as the forerunner of the Messiah Jesus. Isaiah 40:3-5 says, "A voice of one calling: In the desert prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God. Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain. And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind together will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'" This prophecy concerns the forerunner of the Messiah Jesus. As was prophesied, John came as the forerunner of Christ. His clothes were made of camel's hair, and he had a leather belt around his waist. His belt was not a decoration like that of Napoleon Bonaparte. John's clothes made of camel's hair, in all likelihood, looked like a blanket. During the night John used them as his blanket. So when he wore them, he had to use a leather belt around his waist. He ate locusts and wild honey (Mt 3:4).

John the Baptist witnessed to Jesus as God Incarnate. John 1:14-18 says, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, This was he of whom I said, "He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'" From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known." John also testified that Jesus was the Lamb of God, a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. John 1:29 says, "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" In the course of time, John the Baptist became a victim of Herod's immorality and violence. But one thing is clear: John completed his mission. In order to complete his mission he lived a pure and poor life. He did not marry. Finally he became a martyr.

Humanly speaking, John looked pathetic. But he was not. John was a most glorious man among men because he was chosen as the forerunner of Jesus. John is a most glorious man because he gave his life to complete his mission.

God gives his life to each man for an appointed time, together with a specific mission. This is the reason man is precious. If anyone with God's life bestowed on him only enjoys immorality and money-making, he intentionally suppresses the truth and does evil. On the other hand, one who carries out the mission God has given to him can recognize himself and be happy about himself. And, in the sight of God, he is

blessed on earth and possesses the kingdom of God, both at the present and for the everlasting future.