

Why is it, that sometimes, when a local does something extraordinary, they're instantly recognised as "the home-town hero", and yet other times, they're like the tall-poppy that everyone wants to cut down???

....

I don't have an answer for that... But I can tell you why it happened to Jesus...

You see, Jesus' fame, His authoritative teaching, and extraordinary miracles, weren't something the Nazareth locals could just marvel at, sit back, and bask in the glory of their local prodigy... Jesus' message was as confronting to his home-town-crowd, as it was to everyone else... , only they had an added dis-advantage of familiarity, which (as you know) tends to breed contempt...

When Jesus got up to teach in the synagogue that He'd grown up in, the locals were astonished when they heard what He had to say... He taught with wisdom, and he did these mighty miracles, and it wasn't at all, the Jesus they remembered... Now, remember, it's not a matter of Jesus going away as a boy, and coming back as an adult... By their standards, Jesus was somewhat middle-aged when He began His ministry.

And it seems the Jesus they grew up with, and the Jesus they conducted business with, was a very ordinary sort of a bloke... - a tradie...

- Isn't this bloke, the carpenter;
- we know his family;
- we know his brothers and sisters;
- we know his mum...

But, something had changed in Jesus... At His baptism, the Holy Spirit came upon Him...

The same Spirit that came upon the Church at Pentecost; The same Holy Spirit that empowers us today, to do things in Jesus' Name, that we could never achieve ourselves... – that's the Spirit that came upon Jesus. At His baptism, as Jesus ^{Mark 1:10} came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.

In Luke 4, Luke records that following His Baptism, Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit”, and then He faces temptations, and **then** He begins His ministry... Something had changed in Jesus. He was now full of the Holy Spirit.

And now, as he comes home, He'd been rejected from other places before, but now He comes home, and his home-town takes offence at Him...

⁴ And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honour, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”

And He couldn't do any mighty works there, **except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.**

No mighty work?!? – except for a few healings (of course)!! Imagine if someone did that in our church today... If there were a few sick people here today, and there was somebody

here, and they laid their hands on them, and they were healed... We'd be excited, wouldn't we, – so excited to see the power of God at work... And to see the sick healed... That would strengthen our faith, wouldn't it... Well, it didn't in Nazareth.

Jesus **marvelled because of their unbelief**. They had **no** faith...

Do you remember, a week or 2 before Christmas, we were talking about “faith” and “healing”, and how the relationship between faith and healing, is one that is **so** misunderstood in the church today: The faith that God seeks, is not “faith in healing” (itself), but “faith in Jesus”...

Well, that was the problem in Nazareth... They were astonished at Jesus' teaching and healings, but they had no faith in Jesus... - they thought they knew Him all too well... We grew up with Him; He's just a carpenter; We know His family... There's nothing special about them...

And they took offence...

....

Today, we're going to be talking about “The Gospel that offends”... V5 tells us, that they took offence at Jesus...

And you know what??? I reckon that one of the biggest hindrances to the Gospel today, is the fear that we have of offending people... It's crazy, isn't it. “Jesus, I'd die for you, but I'd never risk offending anyone for you.”

We want Christianity to be all nice-and-proper. **We** want to be socially acceptable; We don't want to offend anybody...

Would you agree??? - that the thing that holds us back from sharing the gospel, (more than anything else) is our fear of what others might think of us – that they'll be offended ...

Well, we need to get over that... **I** need to get over that... We need to wake up to the fact that the Gospel (The **true** Gospel), is something that offends... It always has. And it always does, and it always will... If the gospel that is being preached today, is something that doesn't offend people, well, it's probably not the gospel that Jesus preached... and we'll come back to that shortly.

When Jesus said that a prophet isn't welcome in his home-town,, Many of us take that, as a command, "Don't preach in your home-town"... It's nothing of the sort... It's not a command, "Not to preach in our home-town" – it's a heads-up... be prepared for rejection when you **do**... The task of Disciples of Jesus, is to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, wherever we are – whether we're at home, or whether we're away... And when we share the Gospel, be prepared for rejection (especially at home).

Righto:

In V7, Jesus sent out the 12. He sent them out 2x2... And I think that's a lesson for us. As a church, we are on mission

together. So often, we come together here, on a Sunday morning, and then when we go out onto the mission field, we're all on our own... I wonder how much more effective we'd be, if we had a mate with us, and **together**, we **prayed** together; we **shared our faith** together...

And so He sent them out in pairs. And He gave them authority over unclean spirits...

When disciples of Jesus are on mission, we take with us, the authority of Jesus... A lot of us (in fact, most of us) feel that we're not up to the task... Well, that's OK, because Jesus is... And when we take the Name of Jesus out into the world, we go with **His** authority. And even more impressive, is it's a **Spiritual** authority.

So, we take the authority of Jesus with us... What else do we take??

Well, conveniently, He provides us with an equipment list... *When I was a young fella, I used to go on these Scripture Union canoe camps..., where we paddled down the Mary River for most of the week... And we had to take everything with us – we had to carry it all in the canoe...*

- *Drinking water;*
- *5 day's worth of tucker;*
- *sleeping bag;*
- *tent;*
- *dry clothes for night time;;;*
- *very important – toilet paper....*

And we had to fit it all into our (sometimes) waterproof drums, and then we had to fit them into the canoes... And first-timers

would generally stick pretty well exactly to the equipment list...

And Jesus gives His disciples an equipment list, for when they go out on mission...

Basically, take nothing on your journey, except:

- your staff (and that's not staff, as in 'employees' or 'servants' or 'roadies') – A staff, is your walking stick – you can take that, for the rough terrain;
- You can take sandals;
- And the clothes that you're wearing.

- Don't take tucker; or
- money; or
- a bag.
- Don't take an extra set of clothes
- If someone invites you to stay with them, that's where you stay – don't shop around for better living quarters...

For Robyn and I, one of the most humbling things for us, is to depend on others, to meet our needs... When I was a minister, in a particular denomination, the pay cheque came every month. It was a wealthy congregation that could afford it, and even if I upset them all, and they stopped putting money in the offering, I knew, that the synod would continue to pay my stipend – I wouldn't go without...

But when we left that denominational church, and began Bush Disciples, all of a sudden, we were living day-to-day, week-to-week... I know I've told you this before, but I'm going to say

it again, because it's a testimony of how God provides... I'd always heard stories about missionaries, who had spent their last dollar, and they had a bill that was due, and no money to pay it with, and then out of the blue, a cheque would arrive, that got them out of trouble... And I'd heard about it, but I'd never experienced it... But then, when we started Bush Disciples, that became our story...

And even now, I'm struggling with the question of whether I should continue with my part-time business, or should I close up that chapter of my life, and go full-time with ministry, and just trust that God will provide what we need...

But I just want to say, what an encouragement it is, to experience the provision of God, for our daily needs. And you can experience that too....

But, as I read this equipment list for mission, it is so much the **opposite** of how most mission enterprises are conducted today...

These disciples would go into a community, and all they had to share, was the Gospel... In their humility and from a state of poverty, they were at the mercy of those they took the Gospel to...

Isn't that the exact **opposite** of how most missions are conducted today? – where people of wealth, minister to those of need...

Most missions today– we like to see that they're fully funded, before they make a start... Donors are lined up, so that we're

not a burden on those we go to... *I know a chap, who is a missionary in a poor country, and he builds his church, by giving rice and education... He gives a bag of rice to a family, and instantly they become members of the church, because it's a means of receiving rice. They run a school, and people become members of the church because it's a means of getting an education...*

But let's not pick on an overseas mission – what about us in our community??? Most churches, are firmly entrenched into a mind-set, and into a mission perspective, that says, “We have to give something tangible to the community, to get them interested in Jesus.” We have to do this, or do that; We have to meet this need, or that need... And yet, when Jesus sent His disciples out on mission, His mission plan was exactly the opposite...

You go in poverty; **You** go with nothing... You have **nothing** but the Power of God, and gift of the Gospel...

We have become a generation of Christians, who undervalue the Gospel...

You see, to give a hand-out, or to run a program, or to “give back to the community” in some way, well that's not offensive, and that's why we prefer to do it...

Don't get me wrong – these disciples certainly gave back to the community: **they cast out many demons** and many who were sick, were healed...

But the **pinnacle** of what they gave back to the community, is what they preached....

What **did** they preach? What **did** they proclaim??? They had the nerve, to go out, and to proclaim **that people should repent**..... And there, my friends, is the offence of the Gospel...

The most beautiful, life-giving message, to those who don't want to hear it, is the offence that makes men stumble...

Something that's sandwiched in the middle of today's reading, is a gruesome story, that **seems** like a digression, and we might find ourselves wondering, "Why's that bit stuck in there?" In fact, when most people preach on this section of Mark, they divide it into 3 separate messages:

- The rejection of Jesus at Nazareth;
- The sending out of the 12; and
- The execution of John The Baptist.

But Mark doesn't separate it – he sandwiches it altogether.... And I believe, it's important that **we** hold it altogether, because if we don't, we miss what we're being told.

And the bit that's stuck in the middle, is the rather gruesome story of the beheading of John The Baptist. ...

When the disciples of Jesus began preaching that people should repent, and they were casting out demons and healing the sick, King Herod heard about it, and he started wondering, if John the Baptist had come back to life again (presumably to haunt him)...

You see, John the Baptist – **he** had preached the need to repent of sin... He preached the need, to **stop** doing what's wrong, and to **start** doing what's right... and he pointed the finger at King Herod, because King Herod was in an incestuous relationship... And King Herod knew that John The Baptist was a man of God (in fact, he liked to listen to John The Baptist), but even so, he **wouldn't** repent, and so he just locked him up in the dungeon...

Anyway, a long story short, Herodias (his brother's wife that Herod had married), and her daughter, manipulated Herod to execute John The Baptist... His step daughter did a dance that so pleased Herod and his drunken guests, that Herod said "What do you want? I'll give you anything, up to half my kingdom."... So she asked "Mum", and she came back with the demand, "We'll have John The Baptist's head on a platter, thanks."...

^{v26} And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. ²⁷ And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison ²⁸ and brought his head on a platter and gave it to the girl, and the girl gave it to her mother.

A gory story; A sad story... But why the digression? Why is it here: smack-bang in the middle of when the disciples are set out, and when they return?

It's an in-your-face reminder of how offensive the true gospel is... And it carries the weight of the reminder, that disciples of Jesus **will** be persecuted, because the message of the Gospel is offensive...

What was John The Baptist's message, that he was so despised? Mark 1: He was **proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.**

What did Jesus preach? Also Mark 1: **Repent, and believe in the Gospel.**

What did the disciples preach when they were sent out? They **proclaimed that people should repent...**

Much of what is presented as the Gospel today, well it's **not** the Gospel at all... "Repentance of sin" has been redefined from something that demands a change in our direction, to "Just believing in Jesus"...

The offence of the Gospel is, "No matter how good you think you are, you're not good enough"... We are **all** sinners; We all need a saviour. The only way to be saved, is through the blood of Jesus, and the forgiveness and mercy of God... You're hopeless to save yourself; I'm hopeless to save myself...

We have to repent, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to be saved.

To repent means that we turn from our sin, and turn toward Jesus, and believe in Jesus, to be saved...

But turning from sin, **isn't just something we do in our heads...** It has a very real cost to it... John told Herod what repentance would look like for him: He couldn't be married to his brother's wife... And this so offended Herod, that he locked John in the dungeon... And it so offended his incestuous wife, she wanted John dead...

Repentance, isn't just a change of belief – it's a rejection of our old, sinful life (our ways and actions), and embracing the righteousness; and the righteous ways, of being a disciple of Jesus...

I was privileged once, to share the Gospel with a Hindu... And she said to me, "If I become a Christian, what do I have to give up?" ... and the answer is "Everything." ... "You don't just take 'belief in Jesus' and add it to everything else in your life." If Jesus is Lord, we repent of everything that displeases Him...

And that's what's offensive about the Gospel...

The socially acceptable, non-offensive version of the Gospel, that's so often presented today, demands nothing... "You don't have to change your life – just believe in Jesus"... And it's popular. Why is it popular? Why do churches grow, when this message is preached? Because it doesn't offend...

But what about us??? Why would we preach the gospel to repent, and to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved??? Why would we preach this, if we know it's going to offend???? Because it's only offensive to those who aren't being saved... To those whom God is going to call, they will respond to this, because the gospel, is the power of God to save.

Many people **will** reject that message... But not everyone...

As disciples of Jesus, our task, is to preach the Gospel, even though it's offensive, in the knowledge that some will be saved...

In a way, we're like a watchman on the wall of the city. Our duty, is to sound the warning – it is to preach the Gospel.
(not just my duty – our duty – all of us)

But the thing is, sometimes a few people will receive the Gospel, and a few will reject it... but there is also a disturbing possibility, that sometimes an entire town, will reject the Gospel...

V11 says:

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."

We have a responsibility to preach; Those who hear the message, have a responsibility to listen, and to receive the message... If they reject it, well, that's on them... We share the message, because we love. We are willing to offend, for the chance of some being saved...

But if they reject us, they're not so much rejecting us – they're rejecting Jesus... And this rejection, is their own testimony against them...

When we first started Bush Disciples, we planted churches in tiny communities, that not many people would ever consider 'a viable place to plant a church'... Begonia; Dirranbandi; Westmar; Bollon; Thallon.... And then once a month, we'd invite people from these localities, to come in, to worship together in St George...

Well, we persisted for 6 months, and 2 of those places never got going: 6 months on, Bollon and Thallon had zero response to the gospel, and so we pulled out... Did we give up on them? maybe... But in obedience to the scriptures, the red dust of Bollon, and the black soil of Thallon, hasn't been on my car for a while... Who knows? Maybe one day God might lead us back there again, but for now, their disinterest in Jesus is on them.

The end of our bible reading, finishes like this:

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

Sometimes I feel that we might be in danger of being a church who wants to live v31, before we've been the church of v30 and before... We just want to be alone with Jesus, and to rest

a while... And there's a time for that... But first of all, don't we want to be a church, that takes the Gospel, that may be offensive to the world, and give people a chance to respond to it?

Don't we want to be the church, that in prayer, talks to Jesus about what we've done, and what we've taught in His Name???

Don't we want to be that church??? I do..

Questions.