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Nazareth, Johns Death, 5,000 Fed (Part 1)



The Life and Teachings of Christ - Steve Gregg

In this discourse, Steve Gregg discusses several stories from early in Jesus' ministry. He delves into the skepticism and unbelief of the people of Nazareth, exploring how their preconceptions of Jesus as a mere carpenter hindered them from accepting his miraculous abilities. Gregg highlights the importance of faith in receiving blessings and addresses the idea of God's will in healing. He concludes by showcasing how Herod's guilt prevented him from dealing adequately with John the Baptist's unjust death.

Transcript

Today I'd like you to turn to Matthew 13. I have actually ended up following an entire session behind again. We're not really very far behind.

We have been further behind schedule at other times in the year, but we've caught up on some of it. But last week I did follow behind by one session, because we had scheduled one session for the missionary discourse of Matthew 10, and we took two full sessions on that. What we should have taken, and that is what we were scheduled to take in the second half of that, would have been what we're starting with today.

We're talking about the second time Jesus came to Nazareth and also the beheading of John the Baptist, the details of that story. You might recall that I said something about those at the beginning of our last session. I thought at the beginning of our last session we might finish up Matthew 10 and then get into these, because there's not an awful lot that I have to say comparatively, compared to some other passages, on these passages, the reason being that the visit to Nazareth resembles only in less detail a previous visit to Nazareth.

In both cases, the other was in Luke chapter 4, early in Jesus' ministry. This is the second time it would appear he goes to Nazareth, his hometown. In both cases, he is fairly disdained.

His ordinariness, his familiarity to them breeds contempt and they simply don't take him seriously. Actually, the first visit to Nazareth in Luke 4 was a much more detailed account, and most of what we find in this account, in fact probably everything that we

find in this account, has a correspondence to what happened in the earlier visit as well, which means we're going to read this. I'll make a few observations, but there won't be a need to comment on it at length.

Then we have the story of the beheading of John the Baptist. I do not know exactly how much time that will take. I have no doubt that we'll get through that in this session, but my hope is that we might get through both of these stories in the first part of this session, and then use the remainder of the session to go through the material that we would ordinarily be scheduled to go through, which is the feeding of the 5,000.

Now that could warrant a long discussion, and therefore I'm not predicting that we'll get that far, but if we do, we will have caught up on the schedule, at least to the extent that we lost round last week. So, let's look at Matthew 13, beginning with verse 54. Last we read, Jesus had sent out the twelve.

That was what the missionary discourse of Matthew 10 was about. Of course, that's not the last thing that happened in Matthew. Matthew is arranged in somewhat a different order than the order that we're taking the events, but if the accepted chronology is correct, this comes right after that.

Now, the disciples of Jesus are not mentioned in this particular story, not in Matthew anyway, but in Mark's parallel to it, which is in Mark 6, the opening verses, the disciples are mentioned as going with Jesus, which suggests that they have come back from their outing. They were sent on an outreach with the instructions that we considered in Matthew 10, and if the disciples who accompanied him in this story were in fact the twelve, then obviously this would have happened after the end of their outreach. Their outreach would have been passed over without comment.

We don't know exactly what Jesus did while they were gone. The narrative just skips to the time when they've now returned, and they're now accompanying Jesus again. Alternatively, we could say the disciples who went with Jesus to Nazareth on this occasion, which as I say are mentioned only in Mark 6 of this story, might be the disciples other than the twelve.

If the twelve were still out on their mission, we know that Jesus had a larger number of disciples than the apostles, and sometime not too far after this, he sent out seventy. Now, that seventy that he collected or was able to send out must have been with him prior to his sending them out, and it's possible that the twelve were still out on their mission at this time, and the disciples who accompanied him were those excluding the apostles. We cannot be sure, and nor is it very important as far as I can tell.

I can't see any major consideration that hinges on the question of whether the disciples were now back from the outreach or not. In any case, here's how the story goes. Begin with verse 54.

And when he had come to his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, Where did this man get his wisdom in these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things? So they were offended at him, but Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house. And he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Now, as I said a moment ago, this essentially resembles the other visit he made to Nazareth.

In fact, there are some chronologists of the gospel who would say this is the same visit. I'm not sure exactly all the factors that go into deciding whether this is the same visit or a second visit, but it seems that most conservative scholars seem to think this is a second visit, at least in Mark, which I think some feel that Mark's chronology is maybe the most reliable of all the gospels. Mark places this later than apparently happened in Luke and so forth.

And so, you know, we're going to go with I guess the majority of conservative scholars who believe this is a second visit. There's no reason why it couldn't be, but if it is, it's clear that the attitude of his hometown didn't change any from the first time that he'd been there to the present. Now, in Luke 4, which has the first visit, we have much more detail because it actually gives something of Jesus' sermon.

In Luke 4, it tells us that he went into the synagogue in his own hometown of Nazareth, and he preached to them there. And he said, among other things, he read Isaiah 61, the Spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord God has anointed me to preach good tidings to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and so forth, to heal the broken, bind up the brokenhearted. He quotes this passage, and then he says this passage has today been fulfilled in your hearing.

And then a little later in his sermon, he says, you will doubtless say to me, physician, heal yourself. The things we've heard of you doing in Capernaum, do them now here among your own people. But he says, I say to you, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country.

Same thing he says here. Then he goes on and illustrates how that in Elijah's day, there were many widows who needed assistance during the famine, but God didn't send Elijah to any of the widows of Israel. He sent Elijah to a Gentile widow, and her life was sustained for three and a half years during the famine, while Jewish widows were starving.

And he also points out that in the days of Elisha, the prophet, there were many lepers in Israel who didn't receive any help or any healing, but a Gentile, Naaman the Syrian, was healed of leprosy through the ministry of Elisha. Now, Jesus doesn't make application of that except to say that a prophet has not received well in his own country. And of course,

it suggests that Elijah and Elisha were Jews of Israel, and they weren't received in their own country.

It was foreigners, the widow of Zarephath and Naaman the Syrian, who had faith enough to receive anything through their ministry. Now, in addition to illustrating the point that a man is not well received in his own town, those stories that Jesus told illustrate something else, and that is that if a Gentile had sufficient faith, they could get a blessing that a Jew lacking faith would not obtain. And it's suggested that it is faith more than ethnicity that guarantees blessing from God.

That Jews who had leprosy in the days of Elisha, and Jewish widows in the days of Elijah, you might think that they would be the first to be helped by God, since they were Jewish, if God judged on the basis of biological ancestry, if he judged on the basis of race. But he points out that apparently there weren't enough Jews with faith to receive anything from God, but some Gentiles who had faith did. So that God passed over the issue of race and blessed on the basis of faith.

That may be the implications of what Jesus said to them on that first occasion that made them so angry with him that they actually took him out to a precipice and sought to throw him over the edge and kill him. But by the way, that was all in his first visit. As I say, some feel that these passages are talking about the same visit.

That may or may not be true. But in any case, the few things that we're told here are very much like what we're told there. If this is a second visit, we find that the people responded in exactly the same manner, except we don't read here of them trying to kill him.

I guess they've become accustomed to his offensiveness. But what we are told here, something that may have been of value to us, some lessons that are not found in the first story. In verse 55, it says that when they were wondering where he got his wisdom and his mighty works, now there's two things that they couldn't they couldn't figure out where he got them.

His wisdom had to do with the things he was teaching. And his mighty works, of course, were his miracles. It suggests that during his life growing up among them, he had not exhibited particular wisdom that astonished them, nor mighty works.

This was a new thing to them. They had never known him to have those powers or that wisdom during his stay among them, which suggests, of course, what we would otherwise deduce anyway, that when Jesus lived at home in Nazareth, he wasn't conducting any ministry, and he may not have even been empowered with supernatural ability, because he had not yet had the Holy Spirit come upon him as he did later at his baptism. When he left home, he was baptized in water, and then the Holy Spirit came upon him, after that we begin to see ministry beginning, both in terms of mighty works

and in his teaching.

Now, on other occasions, not at Nazareth, Jesus critics the Pharisees and the scribes and the chief priests marveled that Jesus was able to teach as he did and wondered where he got his insights since he had never studied in their theological system, he'd never studied under a rabbi or anything like that, and they commented on that too. But here his local friends, the people, the kids he grew up with and their parents, they've known him, but they knew him so well, familiarity breeds contempt, and they didn't have any respect for any special claims that he had. Now, it's interesting, it seems that when they saw his wisdom and mighty works on this occasion, it should have changed their opinion about him.

I mean, if they were only thinking of him the way he was before, it seems like they would have said, well, he's just an ordinary guy, but now they're hearing him speak and hearing that he has wisdom and seen his mighty works, it may seem, and they're nonetheless still skeptical. Now, I'd like to suggest a solution to that. I don't know that he did any mighty works among them, and as far as his wisdom is concerned, he was no doubt saying things that were wisdom, but they weren't so sure it was wisdom.

I mean, he was no doubt making commentary on scriptures, but they were doubting the actual validity of what he was saying. What they're calling wisdom could be spoken in sarcasm or, you know, it may simply refer to his insights, whether they regard them as genuine wisdom or pseudo-wisdom. The point is, we know we're told specifically he didn't do many mighty works there, all right? So when they say, where did this man get these mighty works, it may be that they're commenting about mighty works, not that they've seen him do right there, but that they've heard about him doing elsewhere.

We know that in his first visit there, which I've already mentioned was recorded in Luke 4, he said to them that, you will probably say to me, the things we heard about you doing in Capernaum, why don't you do them here? Suggesting that he hadn't done mighty works among them, but they had heard of his works done elsewhere. That might be the case here too. When they say, where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works, it may not be wisdom that they are acknowledging the validity of, and it might not be any mighty works that they've seen with their own eyes, or else you'd expect them not, I mean, regardless of what they knew him to be when he was younger, seems like they'd have a change of mind about him if they saw him now doing these kinds of things.

You know, if you'd grown up with Jimi Hendrix when he wasn't a very good guitar player, and you knew him in high school and he couldn't even strum a chord, and then he went away to England, and after some time spent with Mick Jagger, he came back, he came back as the mega guitar player, you know, the mighty, you know, best guitar player in the world by some people's judgment, in a short time, you might say, well, where'd this

guy learn this stuff? Actually, there are theories, people think, some people think under Mick Jagger, he learned Satanism and sold his soul to the devil, and that's why he came back so, with such talent. I don't know that that is true, or have they married or not, but I've heard it theorized, because it was so remarkable that a guy who was not excellent as a guitarist, after one summer spent in England, came back as a super guitar player that dazzled everybody. Now, if you'd grown up with Jimi Hendrix and had heard him try to play guitar before, nothing exceptional about him, nonetheless, if you heard him when he came back, whatever he got around before, you'd have a change of mind, say, hey, this guy's good, you know, this guy, I don't know where he got it, but he's got it, you know, he's got something he didn't have before, and it seems to me that it's a terrible parallel, I mean, Jimi Hendrix and Jesus, but I mean, I'm not so much making a parallel between Jimi Hendrix and Jesus, so much as the reaction of the people to Jesus, and the reaction someone might have to Jimi Hendrix in that kind of situation, that, you know, the guy, they've known him for years, he didn't show any signs of exceptional power or anything like that, but now, all of a sudden, he's been away from home for a few months, and now they're hearing that he's, you know, raising the dead, and doing things like that, the guy they went to grammar school with, you know, and so, but I have a feeling that's what it was, they only heard about it, I think they must have had skepticism about it, because the Bible here comments in the story specifically about their lack of faith, they didn't believe it, and it seems like it'd be hard for them not to believe if he was in their very midst doing the kinds of miracles that they'd heard about, I have a feeling they had their questions about it.

In verse 55, their reaction is said to be, is this not the carpenter's son? Now, I want to clarify something about that, of course, the carpenter in this statement is Joseph, they knew Joseph, they knew Mary, they mentioned Mary by name, isn't his mother called Mary? And they even knew his brothers by name, they probably still lived there. Actually, the brothers might not have still lived there, because we read earlier that Mary and the brothers of Jesus followed Jesus around some of the time, although they weren't believers, I mean Mary was a believer, but the brothers of Jesus didn't believe in him initially. But as early as John chapter 2, we find Jesus' mother and brethren going to the wedding feast where he was, and then following him down to Capernaum and spending some time with him, they might not have spent all their time with him, but it looks like maybe the carpenter's shop was closed in Nazareth now, and they were somewhat more mobile.

Now, I say this because it specifically says, and his sisters, are they not with us? It doesn't say his brothers are with them, that is, that his brothers were still local residents, but his sisters were, which suggests perhaps that his sisters now would be grown, of course, I mean Jesus was 30-something years old, and he was, from the evidence here, he had four younger brothers, and at least two, because sisters is plural, may have been more than two, but at least two sisters, so Jesus was the oldest son of a family of at least

seven children, but even that, at age 30, his youngest sisters may have been in their 20s and may have been married for years, and if they married local boys, they'd still be living in Nazareth, while Jesus' brothers would be more mobile and may have even relocated, but the sisters, if they married locally, would be still there, and that seems to be suggested. Now, the point I want to make about them calling him the carpenter's son, of course, agrees with what we're told in Luke chapter 3, and verse, I think 23, where it says that Jesus, it says Jesus was about 30 years old, Luke 3, 23, Jesus was about 30 years old when he began his ministry, being, as was supposed, the son of Joseph. It says that Jesus was generally regarded and supposed by others to have been the son of Joseph, yeah, that is Luke 3, 23.

Now, of course, both Luke and Matthew have told us previously that Jesus was not the son of Joseph. Matthew and Luke are the only two Gospels that really tell us about the virgin birth, and both of them emphasize that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born, and Joseph was not the father, but this account clarifies that, in spite of the fact that we know better, the local people still regarded Jesus as the illegitimate son of Joseph. I mean, the local people would know that Mary had been pregnant before she and Joseph married, so they not only were familiar with him to the point of thinking of him as an ordinary guy, they probably held him to a certain degree of contempt, because they thought he was the son of Joseph, and after all, everybody knew Joseph, everybody knew Mary even before they were married, and most people, at least the older people would remember, and the younger people may have been told by the older ones, that Mary had to leave town because she was pregnant before they were married, and when they say, isn't this the carpenter's son, and isn't his mother's name Mary, it shows that there was enough familiarity with the family among the local people there to hold him in low regard.

Now, it's interesting that in Mark chapter 6, which is the parallel, in verse 3, in representing their comment, instead of having them say, is this not the carpenter's son, Mark has them saying, is this not the carpenter? Now, you might say, big deal, it's not a real big deal, but it does have some ramifications, because people have often wondered, what did Jesus do with himself from the time he was 12 years old until he was 30? We read of him at age 12, astonishing the teachers in the temple in Luke chapter 2, and that's how Luke chapter 2 closes with that story, but we hear nothing about him again until his ministry begins at around age 30, which means there's about 18 years after Jesus' 12th birthday of his life that are left totally unrecorded, and the silence can be interpreted more than one way. On the one hand, I could be reacted to more than one way. One reaction could be, and this would be my reaction, is that Jesus apparently didn't do anything noteworthy during those years, from age 12 to age 30 when he began his ministry, there was nothing noteworthy in his life, nothing that the gospel writers or any historian would necessarily care to, you know, immortalize in print.

He did very ordinary things. He was just an ordinary guy, or at least was perceived to be,

and there was nothing magnificent or spectacular that happened during those years to record. Now, of course, another reaction one can take to those silent years is to try to fill the gap, and with conjecture.

That's what he did, and I'm sure you know that there are New Agers and others who have tried to say Jesus spent those years traveling to India and Nepal and Egypt and other places, and he was learning the magic arts and sitting under the philosophers, and that's why, so that that would answer the question of the people, where did he get all this stuff? They say, he grew up among us, where did he get all this stuff? Now, I want to tell you, for them to say, is this not the carpenter's son, as it's recorded here, if that's all that they said, it would not tell us that Jesus had ever worked as a carpenter. It would only mean that his assumed father, Joseph, had been known to be a carpenter. It would not affirm that Jesus had ever learned carpentry from Joseph, and it might leave the door open that Jesus had never been a carpenter and traveled and been maybe a traveling student of, you know, mysterious arts or whatever.

However, in Mark's version, which tells us that their comment was, is this not the carpenter? And no doubt, both statements were made. I mean, the people were kind of murmuring and talking among themselves. Some of them knew Jesus as the carpenter's son and spoke him that way.

Others apparently called him the carpenter. Which tells us that not only was Jesus regarded to be the son of a man who's a carpenter, but Jesus was known among his local friends as a carpenter. Now, it's almost certain Jesus didn't do any carpentry work before he was 12 years old.

Therefore, their knowledge of him as a carpenter must apply, at least part of the time, from the time that he was 12 till he was 30. One needn't argue that he worked in carpentry all 18 of those years, although there's no reason to doubt it either. It does, from the way they talk, it does sound as if his abilities had been manifest rather suddenly.

That is to say, he hadn't been some long time away and come back. Now, the reason I say that is because although, given the New Ages scenario, let's, let's for the sake of argument, suppose that their scenario had some validity and that Jesus did wander off for years in the Orient and so forth and he came back with these powers. It is not impossible that when people, you know, after he'd been gone so long and come back, that they might say, where did he get these powers? But they would at least have a hunch that he must have gotten them somewhere during his travels.

You know, he went away, he learned them somewhere. And, but the way they word their, their question sounds as if they've known him only as a carpenter and that there's no accounting for where he got these powers since they, they don't grant that he may have been gone for so long a period of time where he may have learned such things. I

mean, he's, he's been a carpenter among us until, but recently, it sounds like they're saying, and now all of a sudden he's got all these powers.

I don't want to read more into it than, than is actually there, but I certainly think there's more ground from the way this is recorded for saying that during the entire 18 years of silence about Jesus' life, he's probably simply quietly going about the business of being a carpenter. He's not yet called away from that trade. He didn't need to go off for years and learn these things because as he said later about his own works, he said, the works I do are not me, it's the father in me doing them.

The father didn't have to be taught how to do them. And it just had to be the right time for him to begin doing them in Jesus. Likewise, the teachings, he said, these words I speak, they're not my own, they're the father.

It tells him what to say. So there's no need at all to suggest that Jesus had to learn any of the things he did. It just had to be the right time for God to begin to manifest these things through him.

And we have record in the scripture of that happening not prior to the baptism of Jesus. But these people apparently had only heard and not seen much of the reported miracles and stuff of Jesus. And therefore, they're offended, it says in verse 57.

Actually, the word offended, skandalizo is the Greek word, scandalized. It can be translated offended, but it's usually better translated stumbled, which means that, you know, that's a metaphor, of course. It stumbled them.

They were, what's a better way of, what's another metaphor that would say the same kind of thing? They were, it was scandalous to them, is really what it comes down to. Skandalizo is the Greek word from which the English word scandal comes from. It was a scandal to them that he claimed such things when in fact they knew him to be such an ordinary carpenter.

That's the kind of offended they were. They were stumbled. They couldn't allow themselves to believe in him because they knew him too well, they thought.

And then we have Jesus in verse 57 saying, a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house. Now that general concept has been stated by Jesus twice before, it would seem. Once in the gospel of John and once in Luke chapter four, and now this is a third occasion.

So it seems to be one of those repeated statements that Jesus liked to make observation of. It was in John 444 and also in Luke 424 that these, this comment was made previously, or at least the equivalent. The way it reads in Matthew that a prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house is amplified a little bit in Mark.

Mark adds one more phrase to it. Mark has him saying in his own country among his own relatives and in his own house. Of course that doesn't change much of it, but just for your information, Mark makes it a little more lengthy of a statement.

A man is not without honor except in his own country among his own relatives. That's in Mark 6, 4 and in his own house. We've had occasion to talk about this concept before.

We won't take the time now just because of the amount of material I want to cover here. Verse 58, and he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Now it's interesting to compare this side by side with what is said in Mark that's parallel to it.

In Mark 6 verses 5 and 6, we have what is obviously the parallel statement, but it reads a little different. And putting the two together, we get a bigger picture of what the situation was here. In Mark 6, 5 and 6, it says now he could do no mighty work there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

And he marveled because of their unbelief. Then he went about the villages in a circuit teaching. Now the principal difference is that in Luke, excuse me, in Matthew 13, 58, it says he did not do many mighty works there.

Whereas Mark says he could not do many mighty works there. Mark tells us that Jesus was restrained from doing many mighty works there. Matthew just tells us the facts.

He didn't do many. Nothing to report. Mark says he actually couldn't.

He was unable to do many mighty works there. He healed a few sick folks. Now to me, to be able to lay my hands on a few sick folks and see them recover, that would be satisfying to me.

I would call that a good meeting. A few people raised up out of their wheelchairs by the laying on of my hands, I'd say we had a great meeting that night. But Jesus did such extraordinary things that a few cases like that were seemingly insignificant.

It was a dead meeting. Only a few sick folk got healed. But the point is, Mark gives us a slightly different bit of detail there.

Because whereas Matthew just reports not much was done, Mark tells us that Jesus was actually unable to do much. He did heal a few sick folks, but he wasn't able to do as many great mighty works as he had apparently ordinarily done in most places and might otherwise have done here. Now it's also the case that Mark says in verse 6, Mark 6.6, he marveled because of their unbelief.

It does not say in Mark that he could not heal them because of their unbelief. It just says he couldn't heal them, but it doesn't tell us why. It tells us he marveled at their unbelief, but it doesn't connect their unbelief directly as the cause of his being unable to heal, but

Matthew does.

Matthew connects it as the cause. In verse 58 of Matthew 13 says, he did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief. Now the same thoughts are in both passages, but each one gives us a little different light.

I mean when the two are compared. This is why it's, in my opinion, nice to have more than one gospel. These in no sense contradict each other, but they show tremendous independence from each other in the way they report the information and putting them together.

Matthew tells us something Mark doesn't, and Mark tells us something Matthew doesn't. The original contribution and the unique contribution Mark gives us, he tells us, as Matthew does not, that Jesus couldn't do any mighty works there, and Matthew tells us, as Mark does not, that this was because of their unbelief. Now Mark does mention the unbelief, but he doesn't tell us that that's why Jesus couldn't do many mighty works there.

We need Matthew to tell us that. Mark simply says that Jesus marveled at their unbelief. Well, it's an amazing thing when God marvels.

I mean, we read a lot about Jesus doing marvelous things, and the people marveling and being astonished at him, but when God marvels, when Jesus is astonished, you know, it takes a lot to astonish God, I would think. And, you know, the other time that I can recall that it says that Jesus marveled was at the centurion's faith in Matthew chapter 8. He marveled that this guy had so much faith, and he said, I haven't seen such great faith, no, not in all of Israel. Now he's not only in Israel, but in the town he's nearest to, as far as his origins, and he marvels at their unbelief.

Jesus, you know, marveled at two different things on the record so far. He marveled at a Gentile's faith, and he marveled at a Jew's lack of faith, and it was because of this lack of faith Jesus was restricted from doing mighty works. Now, this raises questions about the sovereignty of God, because, and again, you know, I don't mean to harp on positions I disagree with, but from time to time it's impossible to comment fully on a passage without reflecting negatively on someone.

In my mind, the Calvinist view cannot fully account for this wording, because Calvinism states that man's faith is not a condition for God's blessing or God's acting. Man's faith is, in fact, a gift from God, which God sovereignly gives him. Therefore, rather than saying Jesus couldn't do many mighty works because people had unbelief, Calvinism would say people didn't believe because God, they couldn't believe because God didn't give them faith.

But certainly that's not the way that the narrative is given. The narrative doesn't suggest

that it's the people who could not believe, and therefore they didn't get a blessing, but rather God who couldn't bless them because they wouldn't believe, because belief was not something that they brought to the situation, and that was obviously a condition for God's blessing. And of course, that has ramifications not only to this situation, but to salvation itself, because Calvinism would teach that no one can have faith, but God creates faith in those that he chooses to create faith in.

That's all there is to it. And they're speaking mainly in terms of election to salvation, but of course it would follow if God is the only one who institutes faith, and if it's strictly a gift from God and man has no free will in the matter at all, then it would apply to all other functions of faith in the Christian life as well as initial faith in salvation. It would have to do with getting blessings from God, getting prayers answered, or whatever.

You're going to get prayers answered not because you have faith, but because God sovereignly chooses to answer your prayers. And if faith is necessary, he'll give you the faith required because he's the one who's doing all the choosing. But certainly this passage doesn't seem to agree with that outlook of things.

It sounds like there is a certain amount of disappointment. It doesn't say so outright. It says Jesus marveled at their unbelief.

Well, why should that be so surprising? If God didn't give them faith, then they couldn't have faith. Why should that be so surprising to Jesus? Why should he be astonished to find people who have unbelief, when in fact, according to Calvinism, people are doomed all to have unbelief unless God supernaturally gives them faith. It sounds like Jesus thinks these people ought to have more faith than they do, and he's surprised that they don't.

It sounds like there's a little bit of responsibility on them to choose to believe, and their failure to do so limits God. There is a passage in the Old Testament which I wish I had looked up. I did not.

It's in one of the Psalms that talks about Israel coming out of Egypt with reference to their failure to come into the promised land. It is not Psalm 95, which is a Psalm that talks about that, too. It's somewhere after Psalm 100.

I forget which one it is. I think it's between Psalm 100 and Psalm 110, but I couldn't guarantee it. But it talks about how the Jews wouldn't believe him and limited God.

It says they limited the Holy One of Israel, probably referring to the fact that he couldn't bring them into the promised land if they wouldn't trust him. I don't have the reference, and I couldn't guarantee it's in the range that I told you, but I believe it's in one of those Psalms after Psalm 100 and prior to Psalm 110, but it could be beyond that. In any case, it might even be in Psalm 115.

I'm not sure, because that talks about similar things. The point being, if someone finds it, of course, give me the reference. But the expression that is used, at least in the New King James, I'm not sure what the New King James says, but it says they limited the Holy One of Israel, which shows that we can limit God by our low faith and low expectations of him.

God's will is not always done. Things that he would have done had we had enough faith. Yes, again and again they tempted God and limited the Holy One of Israel.

They did not remember his power the day when he redeemed them from the enemy. Because they forgot about his deliverance of the past, they didn't have enough faith to believe him, to give him the future victories they needed to trust him for, and they limited him. Now, one could argue that doesn't mean that they really limited his activity or that God was somehow subject to their faith or lack thereof.

It may mean, as some could say, they simply in their minds limited their expectations. In their thinking about God, their thinking was too limited. In the way that they thought about God, their theology was limited.

They didn't believe God. But I mean, frankly, I don't see any problem taking it the way that Mark 6 suggests, that Jesus couldn't do many mighty works. The people's unbelief prevented him.

They couldn't go into the promised land. God couldn't take them in because they wouldn't trust him. Yes, Jimmy? Well, this particular emphasis that I'm talking about right now would agree well, or let's just say it would be comfortable to people in the faith.

I mean, they of course feel the same way about this point. That doesn't mean that what I'm saying is in any sense a word of faith distinctive. This is more like an Arminian distinctive than the word of faith.

People would like it too. The word of faith suggests far more than I am. What I am suggesting is that God may want to do something and may promise to do something even and may be willing to do something, but our faith or our lack of faith, I should say, can prevent him from doing all he wants to do.

James, for example, when he says in James 4, you ask, excuse me, he says you have not because you ask not. You ask and receive not because you ask amiss or with wrong motives that you may consume it upon your desires. That's James 4 and verse 2, the very last line in James 4, he says you do not have because you do not ask.

Okay, now what this suggests is, I mean, it's very plainly stated, if you had asked, then you would have had. Now you didn't ask, so you don't have. Now that tells us that prayer changes something.

Prayer isn't just a spiritual therapeutic to make you feel better about a bad situation that you just talked to God for a while. It's sort of like transcendental meditation. It's a relaxing technique and you walk away feeling a little better, but nothing's changed.

The Bible indicates that prayer changes circumstances and that some circumstances prevail simply because we have not asked for God to change them. There are things that we don't have, not because God has chosen not to give them to us, but because we have failed to ask. Now, of course, James emphasizes also something else, which has to be brought into the whole picture.

In James chapter 1, he said in verse 6, James 1, 6, but let him ask in faith, talking about prayer again, let him ask in faith with no doubting. For he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. Let not that man suppose that he'll receive anything from the Lord.

So James tells us, sometimes we don't have what we would otherwise have because we've neglected to pray for it. Furthermore, prayer has to be specifically coupled with faith. So it could also be, and if the man who doesn't have faith asks for something from God, he shouldn't really expect to receive anything from the Lord because faith is a necessary ingredient to getting prayers answered.

What we can say on the basis of these two statements, and others in the scripture that we could look at if we wanted to belabor it, is that some conditions prevail, not because they're the will of God, and not because God has deemed that they must prevail, but because Christians have neglected to pray with faith for a change in those circumstances. And whether that's about our health, or whether that's about government oppression, or whatever, there are some things, I don't say all things are God's will, and this is where the word of faith and I part company. I wanted to try to point out, my belief is that whatever is in fact the declared will of God, we should pray for and believe for, and we will see it happen.

Because it says in 1 John 5.14 that we know this is the confidence that we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us, we know that we have the petitions we desire of him. So according to his will is a factor there.

That's 1 John 5.14 says that. But what is implied in Mark is that Jesus wanted to do more mighty works, but he was limited, because they didn't ask, and they didn't believe. Well, I mean, we don't know that they asked or didn't ask, but they didn't have faith, so even if they did ask, they did so without faith.

It was for lack of believing requesting that the people didn't receive more miracles from the hands of Jesus. Now the word of faith, I wanted to again tell you what I'm saying is different from them. The word of faith actually says you can write your own ticket.

The question of God's will in the question is irrelevant, because faith is a force by which you, if you learn how to manipulate it, can create your own realities. It's like you are little gods yourself. It's not that you are subject to the will of God, in fact, they ridicule persons who pray, God, if it's your will, heal so and so, or if it's your will, do this thing for us.

They say, well, by saying if it's your will, you're just leaving yourself an out. It shows that you don't have faith in God. Well, it's interesting that Jesus prayed, if it be your will, let this cup pass from me, and also James said, for this we ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.

He doesn't advocate positive confession there. He talks about submitting to the will of God in our plans and our prayers. But the word of God is a force by which you can manipulate it, and it's a force by which you can manipulate it.

So, the question of faith is, no, that's lack of faith. They say, you basically need to understand that there's a force available to all. Even non-Christians can manipulate it.

That's what Kenneth Hagin has said. He says, a lot of times, non-Christians get their prayers answered, where Christians don't, because non-Christians have sometimes learned how to use this faith force. And what that tells us about Hagin and his doctrines is that faith to him is nothing to do with a relationship with God.

It has to do with harnessing energies, harnessing powers that are out there. They're sort of esoteric occult kind of powers. He wouldn't call them occult, but that's basically what they end up being.

If it's something that a non-Christian, without a relation with God whatsoever, no faith in God himself, but just faith in his faith, faith that what he said is going to happen, is going to happen, and that that gets results, then of course what we are talking about is something other than God's power, other than a relationship with God, other than persons submitting their lives or their prayers to the demanding and expecting and positive thinking and so forth. And a lot of that, of course, is in the church, not even in the Word of Faith. You've got the positive confession, and you've got possibility thinking coming from Robert Shuler and so forth, and that's all the same kind of occultism.

Hey brother, welcome back. Yeah, Jimmy. In the case of unbelief, well, that's the question.

Can God respond to unbelief? It's an interesting thing that says Jesus could do no mighty works there, and it connects it with their unbelief. Now, what is the goodness? I mean, what is it that, what is, in what sense could he not? Is it that his power was limited, and therefore he couldn't do a thing, he was just powerless? Or does it mean, rather, that he couldn't entrust them with miracles? He couldn't entrust them with things, you don't

have to cast your pearls before swine, you know, they were unbelievers. They were not on his side, they didn't trust God, and therefore it would be not so much that he was powerless, as it would be against his policies to grant this.

In any case, it could say he couldn't do it. Just like if I knew my son to be a wasteful, and every time I gave him money, he went out and wasted on stuff that was no good, and he said, Pop, can I have ten bucks? Even, now, if I say, no, I can't give you ten dollars, I might mean by that I don't have the money to spare, and that could be true, but it might also be I'm simply saying, I can't trust you with it. I can't do that.

It would go against my grain and my policies to give you money when I know you're just going to go out and do something damaging with it, or whatever. I mean, in either case, it could be said I could not grant his request. I don't know in which sense it means here.

All I know is that whether it's simply against God's policies, or whether there's some sense in which God's power is limited by a lack of faith, I don't know, but in either case, the result's the same. You don't get it. You know, you don't, your prayers are not answered if there's no faith, and God is either, either as a nature, unable to grant it.

So that's what we get from this story of Jesus' Nazareth ministry. He left there. Once again, the people refused to believe his testimony.

Their unbelief hindered them. Now we go on to Matthew 14, and the first twelve verses, the story of the beheading on the end of John the Baptist. At that time, Herod the Tetrarch heard the report about Jesus, and said to his servants, this is John the Baptist.

He's risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him. For Herod had laid hold of John, and bound him, and put him in prison, for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. For John had said to him, it is not lawful for you to have her.

And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet. But when Herod's birthday was celebrated, the daughter of Herodias danced before them, and pleased Herod. Therefore he promised with an oath to give to her whatever she might ask.

For she, having been prompted by her mother, said, give me John the Baptist's head here on a platter. And the king was sorry. Nevertheless, because of the oaths, and because of those who sat with him at the table, he commanded it to be given to her.

So he sent, and had John beheaded in prison. And his head was brought on a platter, and given to the girl, and she brought it to her mother. Then his disciples came and took away the body, and buried it, and went and told Jesus.

Now, of course, the main bulk of this passage is describing John the Baptist's death, but we need to notice that it's not telling us when this took place. What follows here,

chronologically, is that Herod hears about Jesus, and his guilty conscience about what he had previously done to John the Baptist, causes him to fear, and say, well, this is John the Baptist come back to haunt me. He's got more power than ever.

And that the writer takes the occasion to tell us what had happened to John the Baptist, though the time frame of the death of John the Baptist is not related here. All we know is that it happened sometime prior to this, maybe months or days only. I think most commentators would assume, and it's probably safe to say, too, that in all likelihood, this death of John the Baptist was still recent in Herod's memory when he began to react like this.

A man often will feel bad about a criminal act for a while, even if he's a notorious criminal. He might have some conscience about it for a while, but he usually learns to live with it. Eventually, he suppresses that, and just learns to let life go on, and hardens himself against conviction.

And therefore, it's probable that since Herod was still so touchy about this whole thing, and so guilt-ridden about it, and so paranoid as a result of his guilt, that probably no great time had elapsed since he had had John the Baptist killed. On the other hand, if a great time had elapsed, it shows that Herod had not been able to deal with his guilt, even though a certain amount of time had elapsed. So we couldn't demonstrate that to be the case or not.

It is.