

18. Christ Rejected at Nazareth

“Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, ‘Where did this man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him.

“But Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house.’ 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.” (Mark 6:1-6)

THE BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF JESUS?!!

In one of our first studies of the life of Jesus, we emphasized the Biblical teaching about the birth of Jesus, noting that he was born of a virgin. Mary, his mother, did not have sexual relations with a man before she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Jesus, she was still a virgin. It is often taught that Mary remained a virgin forever, even after the birth of Jesus. For many people, this purity, this perpetual virginity, is the reason they honor Mary so much. It is certainly the reason that they always refer to her as “the virgin Mary” or simply “the virgin.”

When we tell them that all the evidence indicates that she had sexual relations with her husband Joseph after the birth of Jesus, it is, for them, as though we have spoken evil of this pious woman. But it is the most natural way to understand what is said in Matthew 1:25: Joseph “did not know her till [kept her a virgin until—NASV] she had brought forth her firstborn Son. And he called His name Jesus.” A woman is not defiled when she has sexual relations with her own husband. On the contrary, when a woman refuses to have sexual relations

with her husband, she is disobeying God. 1 Corinthians 7:4,5 says:

“The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does. And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does. Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.”

If Mary had refused to sleep with Joseph, she would not have been a good wife. She would not have been a good example for other women to follow. But nothing in the Bible suggests that Mary remained a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. On the other hand, several passages lead us in the opposite direction. These are the passages that refer to the brothers and sisters of Jesus.

Earlier we read about a visit by Jesus to the village of Nazareth where he grew up. In Mark 6:3, the people of Nazareth said, “‘Is this not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?’ So they were offended at Him.” In Acts 1:14, we find his brothers among those who believed in him and prayed with the others after his ascension. “These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.” The apostle Paul also spoke of those who were called brothers of the Lord. In 1 Corinthians 9:5, he said, “Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?” In Galatians 1:19, Paul said, in speaking of a visit to Jerusalem, “But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.”

Some people try to deny the natural meaning of these verses, telling us that the Bible is talking of cousins and not brothers of Jesus. They want us to believe that the word “cousin” did not exist in those days. They say it’s like in Africa, where no distinction is made between cousin and brother. But this is not the case. The apostle Paul, who was a Jew, knew how to make the distinction. In Colossians 4:10, he

wrote, "Aristarchus my fellow prisoner greets you, with Mark the cousin of Barnabas."

In fact, there is no Biblical reason to think that the residents of Nazareth were not speaking of true brothers and sisters of Jesus when they cited their names. The idea was this: "We know this Jesus. He grew up among us. We know perfectly well his family: his mother, his brothers and his sisters. He may be able to deceive others, but we know him here. This is the carpenter. That's all." Not only did the residents of Nazareth not believe in Jesus, but his own brothers had the same attitude—at least before the resurrection. In John 7:5, we read, "For even His brothers did not believe in Him."

WHY DIDN'T THEY BELIEVE?

So remember that Mary had other children. She had at least five sons and two daughters. So what? Where is the harm in this for a married woman? But why this incredulous attitude from those who knew him and within this family in which he grew up? Why didn't they have respect for Jesus, who at that time was acclaimed everywhere else as a great prophet?

The words of Jesus suggest he was dealing with something that occurs rather often: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house" (Mark 6:4). Why is this? Probably because those who are close to a person already have set ideas about the person before he is manifested as a prophet of God. They have already classified him. They did not see him do miracles during his youth. They did not hear him preach publicly while he was living among them. So they make the mistake of thinking that he is not capable of these things, or they do not realize that, in God's plan, the person must wait for a particular moment to begin his ministry.

The people of Nazareth simply had prejudices. They had already judged Jesus did not want to "open his file" again to reconsider. They had closed minds. To come to faith, to know truth, we must first have an open mind that is willing to examine without partiality the proofs which are presented to us. The next requirement is that the proofs be worthy of faith, reasonable and logical. They have

to stand up to scrutiny. And finally, we must exercise our free will and make a choice. Many motivations are able to lead men to refuse to believe, even when they find themselves facing incontrovertible proofs. Pride especially prevents them from recognizing certain truths. We are afraid to recognize that we were wrong; afraid that others will mock us. We don't want to give up a lifestyle that is contrary to the truth we are faced with. We don't want to associate with certain people who were supporters of this truth before us, etc. So we look for arguments to refute what is nevertheless true.

But the people of Nazareth are not the only people who have closed their minds in regard to Jesus, believing they already know all there is to know about him. Many of the people who live in so-called Christian lands have already labeled Jesus without examining his life and without considering his teachings. Many young people who grow up in Christian families do not take a serious interest in him. Sometimes it's because the example of their parents leaves a lot to be desired. Sometimes it's because the young people want to live according to the pleasures of the world. Either way, they reject Jesus without ever really knowing him.

All this makes us think of the Jewish people who, as a rule, should have been the first to accept the Gospel. In reality, it was a minority of the Jews who believed in the good news, despite all that God had done to reveal Himself to them. It's like the Lord said in Romans 10:20,21, "I was found by those who did not seek Me; I was made manifest to those who did not ask for Me.' But to Israel he says: 'All day long I have stretched out My hands to a disobedient and contrary people.'"

Because of the unbelief of the residents of Nazareth, Jesus "could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them" (Mark 6:5). Do not misunderstand this sentence. It is not that Jesus, like some so-called healers and prophets of our day, suffered setbacks and did not manage to do certain miracles and then placed the blame on the lack of faith in others. Jesus showed in many ways that he could heal without the sick person having faith. He could heal from a distance. He healed when the sick per-

son did not even know him. He raised the dead. The problem in Nazareth is certainly explainable by this passage from the Epistle of James, the brother of the Lord: “You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures” (James 4:2b,3). Jesus was not incapable of doing miracles in Nazareth. He didn't do many, because, in their lack of faith, the inhabitants of his village did not ask for much.

CONCLUSION

So let us summarize. After the miraculous birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph had other children in a non-miraculous way. They raised their family in Nazareth in Galilee, and Jesus learned the craft of carpentry—that of his stepfather Joseph. When Jesus, at age 30, began his public ministry, he became

famous because of his miracles and his teachings, and many believed in him. But when Jesus came to preach in Nazareth, most of the inhabitants—even his own brothers—did not believe in him. Thinking they knew him perfectly well (while they only knew him partly, superficially), they did not take seriously what he was doing. Having a closed mind, they only took him to be a carpenter and not a prophet, much less the Messiah—that is, the Christ. So they deprived themselves, not only of the miracles that he could have done among them, but also of the spiritual life that he offered.

And you? Have you formed an opinion on Jesus without really knowing him? There is no more serious error that we can commit in life. Examine his life, receive his teachings, and by faith, repentance and baptism, receive his forgiveness and life eternal.