

To God Alone Be The Glory

Well, that's quite a mysterious chapter in Jesus' life! The gist is easy. Jesus goes back to his hometown after becoming well-known as a teacher and a miracle worker. He serves as guest preacher in the synagogue one Saturday. At first the people seem to be amazed at his sermon. But all of a sudden they don't like him anymore. They won't believe in him as the long-promised Messiah. Jesus moves on to preach the good news elsewhere.

Okay, we get the main points. But how did things turn against Jesus so quickly? Why wouldn't they accept Jesus as Savior? They acknowledged him as wise and capable of miracles (see v 4). But they decided not to accept what they had heard and seen. Isn't that called "being stubborn"? 'Stubborn' is bad enough, but 'stubborn' has a nasty cousin called 'unbelief.' Unbelief can be quite unreasonable and illogical. And unbelief can be overcome only by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). So when Jesus shared the good news in Nazareth, the Holy Spirit was definitely working on the people. But when the people stubbornly resisted the Holy Spirit and rejected God's truth... Well, you can understand why Jesus ⁶*was amazed at their lack of faith.*

Think about this. When Jews elsewhere heard Jesus' message, they compared it to what they had learned in the Holy Scriptures, and they connected the dots and said things like: "Hey, this Jesus is the actual Savior that the Lord has promised us for many centuries." Ok, but the people in Nazareth had studied the same Hebrew Scriptures. Yet when they heard the good news from Jesus' lips that he

is the Messiah, they said, "Well that's a fine message, but this can't be real. What sort of wisdom is this that has been conferred on him? What makes him so special? ³*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us? We know this guy. He grew up here. Is he trying to 'rise above his roots'? How could this ordinary fellow from our little town be the awesome, regal, long-promised Messiah?"*

Jesus did not reply softly. He confronted them with strong statements, something like this: "You expect me to prove that I'm the Messiah by doing miracles right here in front of you, even though you've heard that I have done many miracles in other places. I even healed a few sick people in this town on this visit (see v. 5), yet you refuse to believe. You want to rely on evidence rather than on truth. This fits the old saying, ⁴*'Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.'* But my mission in life is not to 'impress my hometown folks with miracles.' Your connection to me does not give you an advantage in God's kingdom (see Luke 4:25-27). God wants everyone to be saved. So my mission is to seek all the lost, even people you might think don't deserve to be rescued from their sins."

Perhaps now it makes more sense why the Nazarenes took offense at Jesus, why they stumbled over him spiritually, as if he were uneven sidewalk that grabs your shoe and trips you. Luke tells us that the people tried to throw Jesus down the eastern slope of the hill on which their town was situated. It

wasn't exactly a cliff, but its slope descended quickly by at least 50 feet, enough to do serious injury or even cause death if a person were rolled down it. But it wasn't Jesus' time to die, so "*he walked right through the crowd and went on his way*" (Luke 4:30).

Stack the facts next to each other. The Nazarenes refused to believe Jesus is the Son of God. So Jesus demonstrated his almighty power as God, not by crushing them to a fine powder, but by walking right through those hostiles and leaving. I wonder if this grace got their attention. Or did they perhaps stay mired in their anger and unbelief, ignoring how Jesus had just escaped their fury.

Now come forward into the present. Maybe it's just that we live in a culture where most people don't want to be confronted about their lack of faith in Jesus, but, I've got to tell you, the way Jesus talks to the people of Nazareth grabs my attention. I wonder if we are bold enough... bold enough to befriend people, to care about them, to watch for ways to bring them the message about their sin and God's grace, to let them in on the secret that Jesus took away all sins.

When I think about being bold like this, a question nags at my mind: IF JESUS, the Son of God, WAS REJECTED, WHY WOULD ANYONE LISTEN TO US? But it's really important not to use this Bible story as a reason to give up on reaching out with the good news.

Consider the facts beyond this story. Jesus went to other villages in that region, and the people there believed in him. After Pentecost Jesus' twelve friends, despite little education, were made bold by the Holy Spirit

and spoke up about Jesus. And by God's grace some people listened. They told others who, by God's grace, listened. This chain added links again and again and again until someone told you: "You have sinned against God, but God found a way to pay the penalty for your sins so you can live in his wonderful, heavenly home." By God's grace you listened. That's what happens when people hear the law and the gospel—the Holy Spirit brings some of them to faith in Jesus.

If we let our fears... If we let worldly pressures keep us silent, then it is certain that some who might listen won't hear the good news from us. But Jesus teaches that a main part of following him is to share the good news with others. So challenge yourself with this hard question: "How much does it mean to me that my Savior is preparing a place in heaven for me instead of my well-deserved place in hell?"

"But what if people won't listen?" It is not our job to make anyone listen. It is only our job to make our Savior look good through our behaviors and point people to Jesus as their Savior. Whenever someone doesn't listen to us, we're in good company, with our master Jesus. On the Last Day I'd rather be standing with Jesus than not. So I'm going to stand with Jesus now" (see Matthew 10:32-33).

[What follows is a demonstration of a way to use the law and the gospel when telling people about Jesus.]

Creating Opportunities to Talk about Jesus

What are some things that keep Christians from sharing what they believe about Jesus? (fear of rejection or ridicule, don't feel confident about what to say)

- Here's a fast way to overcome our fear. Consider: When people die, they go to one of two places. According to the Bible what are the two places?
- If a person is already going to hell, can you possibly make it worse for them by witnessing?
- Which is worse: what you fear or what they face in hell?
- OK, now I'm ready to witness.

Step One: Be friendly. Talk with people. Practice at the grocery store, or any time you're standing in line, or at a park. "Hello." "How are you doing today?" Start a conversation about everyday things. Weather ("Nice weather we're having, huh?"), sports ("Did you see the same game I saw yesterday?"), news (—a *positive* news story, "Did you hear the neat thing that happened last week?"), point at something interesting (clever sign) or beautiful (flower). Many people will respond to your warmth with a warm heart. Your intention is to set yourself at ease and set them at ease. Tell them your first name. Keep being yourself. It's easy to talk about the things of this life.

It's okay to practice on Step One for a few days or weeks. Almost anyone can learn to be friendly. In Step One you're just building a bridge, a real friendship.

Step Two. Swing the conversation to spiritual things. (Read how Jesus did this in John 4.) Ask the Lord to help you see when "now" is a good time.

Here are some conversation starters. "Do you know of a good church in this area?" (Think of all the directions this conversation could take.) "Hey, what do you think happens to people when their life ends? Where do they go to?" (Because you haven't mentioned God, sin, Judgment Day or hell, you aren't preaching anything. You have asked their opinion, something most people are willing, even happy, to talk about.) Most people believe that "God" exists.

Again it's okay to practice Step Two a while. You probably had to practice riding a bicycle in a straight line before you were ready to make turns or stop or go fast.

Step Three. It's finally time to witness.

Think **WDJD**. **W**hat **D**id **J**esus **D**o?

W. "Would you consider yourself to be a good person?"

Since most people think of themselves as "pretty good" or "really good," they won't be offended. In fact they probably will be happy to tell you they are good. This reveals a self confidence in their own righteousness.

A few people will tell you they are not good. Either they've been well-trained in the Bible and are convinced of what we confess in church every week, or they have done something they still feel guilty about, or they are honest in their self-assessment, or they are kidding (in which case you keep following the plan below). Occasionally people say they aren't good. Ask them what they mean. If they confess a sin, skip ahead to the final **D**: *Dzsting* (next page).

By the way, anytime someone asserts, "I'm a good person," they are helping you skip over Step One, Step Two (previous page), and **W** (this page).

You can say, "There's a test for that, you know." "A test for what?" "There's a test to see if you're a good person. Would you like to hear the first question?"

What did Jesus do to self-righteous people? He humbled them. He didn't humiliate them. He just lovingly humbled them with the law.

D. Do you think you have kept the Ten Commandments?

It doesn't really matter if a person claims they have or have not kept the Commandments.

Your next question is:

"May I ask you a few questions to see if that's so?"

Most people will agree because they are fairly confident of their goodness, or they are curious about where this is all going. Because most people are comfortable admitting that they have told a lie, start with the 8th Commandment (bearing false witness).

1. "Have you ever told a lie?"

Some people won't even blush to admit they've lied. Most will say yes. Many will minimize their lying by characterizing the lies as "little white lies," the kind you tell to spare someone's feelings. If someone claims never to have lied, press them gently.

"Not even when you were a kid, or to stay out of trouble, or when returning an item you bought, or to spare someone's feelings?"

When a person admits to lying, smile, lower your head a little, and say gently,

"Me too. What does that make each of us?"

(A liar)

If they get squeamish about calling themselves a liar, flip things around.

"If I lied to you, what would you call me?"

At this point people may try to sidetrack you, distract you, deflect your attention elsewhere. If they go so far as to say they don't believe the Bible, you might reply,

"I understand that you don't believe it, but I'm just sharing what the Bible says. Okay? Let's go to the next question..."

2. "Have you ever stolen anything?"

Some will admit it right away. If you have to press them gently, say,

"Are you saying you never took anything that didn't belong to you? Not even when you were at work or when you were younger? It's ok to be honest before God."

You're trying to get to the point where you say, gently, with a smile,

"Me too. What does that make us?" (A thief)

You may have to flip things around on them.

"If I stole something from you, what would that make me?"

3. "Have you ever committed adultery?"

(Over half of all married men and women have cheated on their spouse. Even 4 out of 10 pastors have had extra-marital affairs after becoming pastors.)

If they say no, drill a little deeper.

“Jesus taught that if you lust after someone, you have committed adultery in your heart. Have you ever lusted after anyone? I have. What does that make us each?” (An adulterer.)

4. “Have you ever said, ‘omygod!’ or ‘God! it’s hot [cold, muggy] out today!’?” (probably yes) “This is sometimes called ‘taking God’s name in vain.’ And it’s more serious than people realize. Instead of using harmless words like ‘Wow!’ or ‘Ugh!’ you used the name of the One who gave you life and sustained your life as an expression of surprise or disgust. God promises that He will not hold anyone blameless who takes His name in vain.”

By this time the person will either be squirming a bit or still holding onto their own goodness. If they need more law, go through more commandments. If they appear to recognize their guilt, it’s time to say, gently but with some seriousness,

“By our own admission, we are each a lying, thieving, adulterous blasphemer.”

J. (Judgment Day) “On Judgment Day, if God judges you by the Ten Commandments, will you be innocent or guilty?”

A few people may try to assert that there won’t be a Judgment Day. A good reply is, “Lots of people don’t want there to be a day of judgment, but the Bible says that everyone must appear before God to answer for the things they did during this life. What if the Bible is right? On Judgment Day, if God judges us by the Ten Commandments, will we be innocent or guilty?”

If a person answers, “Innocent,” reply, “Really? You just admitted that you’re a liar, a thief, an adulterer, and a blasphemer. If God judges you on the basis of His Ten Commandments, will you be innocent or guilty?”

Expect people to squirm a bit. “But I haven’t done those things for a long time.” Or “Other people have done far worse.” Or “But I’ve done all kinds of good things too. Don’t I get credit for any of them?” Reply:

“Imagine trying these defenses in a courtroom. ‘Your Honor, I haven’t murdered anyone for a long time.’ Or ‘Other people have stolen a lot more than I have.’ Or ‘I contributed to the local food bank—don’t I get credit against my crimes for doing good?’ If a criminal did anything serious against you or your family, and a judge let the criminal off with a light sentence, you would accuse the judge of being unfair. Just as there is no statute of limitations on murder or war crimes, God doesn’t forget sin. Do you think you will be innocent or guilty?”

“But you’re talking about human law. God is different.”

“You’re right. God’s standards are much higher. He has promised to punish not just the big sins like murder and rape but the sins people think are not so bad like worry and lying. We’re in big trouble, aren’t we?”

Your intention here is to help the person move from being **aware** of their sins to being **alarmed** over the consequences. Those who reject the Savior really are in danger—of hell.

“Let’s imagine that a computer chip has been placed behind your ear. It records everything that runs through your mind for a whole week—every secret thought, every deed, and every word that comes out of your mouth. At the end of the week all of your friends and family are called together, and all of your thoughts are displayed on a big screen for them to see. How would you feel? Embarrassed? Ashamed? That’s just what will happen on the day when God requires you to give an account for everything you’ve said and done during your whole life. All of your secrets will be laid bare before Him. You are in big trouble.”

Sometimes people just won't admit their guilt.

For these you may have to say,

“If you were being honest with yourself you would know that you will be guilty before God. This is also what the Bible teaches. So if you claim to be innocent, you are calling God a liar.”

D. Dęsting—Will you go to hęavęn or to hęll?

Gently ask, “Do you think you will go to heaven or to hell?”

People generally won't be offended because you are simply asking a question. You haven't told them where they are going.

If anyone still thinks they will go to heaven, loop back around to an earlier part of this process and try again. Or ask,

“Who will pay the penalty for your crimes against God? If God were to let you go without any consequence for doing wrong, He would be the God of Injustice. And no one would ever respect Him. If there is no consequence for wrongdoing, what keeps me from trying to get away with as much as I can? The Bible teaches that there will be a day of reckoning. If you are guilty before God, will you go to heaven or to hell?”

If they say, “Hell,” gently ask,

“Are you concerned about this?”

If they don't seem to be concerned, it is spiritually helpful to point out what hell will be like. Consult these passages: Mark 9:44, Luke 13:28, Matthew 25:46, Daniel 12:2, Jude 1:7,13.

By this point it's important to let them know that you don't want them to go to hell, and more importantly God doesn't want anyone to go to hell either (cf Ezekiel 33:11). Remind them that most people don't know when their last day on earth will be. What if they have to face God's judgment tonight? Isn't it time to stop counting on their own sense of being good enough for God?

As much as you want to share the Good News about Jesus, don't give the comfort of the gospel

to someone who is not sorry (cf 1 John 1:5-10). Follow Paul's example in Acts 28:24-28. See also Acts 13:42-46.

Of course, as soon as someone expresses concern about going to hell, like the jailor in Philippi who asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30), or like the people who heard Peter preach on Pentecost and asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37), it's time to share the good news about Jesus. You hear the good news every week in worship. You know what to say.

“I am guilty before God too. So let's say we're both in court, and a judge sentences us to pay a \$5,000,000 fine. Let's say we don't have enough to pay the fine. If someone else pays the fine, is it fair for the judge to let us go? [Yes.] In fact, that's what God did so everyone can go to heaven. He had Jesus, His own Son, pay the penalty for our sins against Him.”

You might quote John 3:16 or 1 John 2:2 “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. ²He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”

“This is what the Bible teaches. I believe it because God convinced me of His love in Jesus. He wants everyone to believe this and have a place in His heavenly home.”

Encourage them to hear God's Word weekly and read it daily so the Holy Spirit strengthens their new faith. Continue to be a real friend to them, even if they reject what you've said. Try to stay in contact with them.

Most of this material is drawn from the book, “The Way of the Master” by Ray Comfort, published in 2006 by Bridge-Logos in Alachua, Florida. www.WayofTheMaster.com. Be aware of some theology that is worded not carefully enough in his book, often phrased something like, “Jesus died on the cross for you. All you have to do is repent and believe in him.” Clearly no faith will result in no heaven, but saving faith in Jesus is as much a gift from God as forgiveness of sins. Faith comes to those whom the Holy Spirit works on through the law and the gospel. Comfort does an *excellent* job of teaching how important it is to use the law of God in our evangelism.