

Matthew 13:58 **Unbelief Can Not Stop the Work of the Lord**

Well, we are finishing out Matthew chapter 13 this morning. We've taken the entire chapter except for the last verse. And, since we didn't have time to get it all in the last week, as important as it is, we are going to focus on it this week, as it is a verse of importance, Matthew 13:58.

Matthew chapter 13 is the chapter on the parables. There are eight parables spoken by the Lord. The first four were spoken in public. The last four were spoken to the disciples. And then, after the last parable, The Parable of the Householder, we see in verses 53 to 58, this entire section is entitled A Prophet Without Honor.

When Jesus finished the parables, He departed from there and when He came into His country, His own country, that is, His homeland. So, He returns now to Nazareth. And He was teaching them in the synagogue, so as they were astonished, and they began to say, "From where did this One get this wisdom and these works of power?"

So, Jesus comes back to the neighborhood and the homeland in which He grew up as a boy. He had a family there in Nazareth. We saw last week in the study, we will read it here in a moment, His mother and His father and His half-brothers and half-sisters all grew up together in Nazareth. So now, He comes with these mighty works of power and these words of wisdom, and the home town folks are saying, "Where did He get all this? He grew up here. He was a little boy here. Now that He's 30 years old and a grown man, where did He get all this?"

It says in verse 55, they asked the question, **"Is not this the son of the carpenter?"** So, He would help His father in the carpenter shop. And, as I said last week, maybe some of them are in town going, "Yeah. He and His dad put in my cabinets for me in the kitchen." You know? The down to earth normal everyday things, except there wasn't anything normal and everyday about Jesus. He was sinless. He, still as a boy, human age as a boy, was the fullness of God Himself. So, there is something different about Him, yet there's something normal. He lived in the neighborhood with everyone else.

"Is not His mother being called Mary?" Μαριάμ (Marian) in the Greek text, her Jewish name. "Isn't His mother Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph, and Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? From where therefore *did* this one get all of these things?"

We saw last week that Mary and Joseph, according to Matthew 1:25, that they had normal physical relationships as husband and wife after the birth of Christ. She was a virgin all the way up to the birth of Christ, afterwards they had normal physical marriage relationships between the two of them.

We know that during the Lord's public ministry, that His family was against Him. His brothers did not believe in Him. In fact, John 7:5 they were mocking Him. When the crowds left Him after He gave a sermon and they came to Him and says, "You need to go into Jerusalem

and perform some miracles and get another following." They were mocking Him. But we know from Acts 1:14 that after the Lord's resurrection and He appears to His brothers, that they believed. So, Acts 1:14 is that Mary and the Lord's brothers were in the group of 120 waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2.

We know that two books in the New Testament were written by the Lord's half-brothers. The book of James was written by the Lord's half-brother James. James was also of the head of the church in Jerusalem, according to Acts chapter 15. Judas, not Judas Iscariot, but Judas another half-brother of Jesus wrote the book of Jude, the one-chapter book right before the book of Revelation. So, two books in the New Testament written by the half-brothers of Jesus.

So, the townsfolk, it says in verse 57, **And they were offended in Him**, because, basically, he's presenting Himself now as the anointing of God Himself, but then they knew Him from growing up as a boy in the in the neighborhood. **They were offended in Him**. But here is the proverb, not parable, but here's the proverb that Jesus gave: **A prophet is not without honor, except in his homeland, and in his own house**. I have seen that over the years. The more people become familiar with your human side of life, the less effective your words are to them if you speak to them concerning spiritual things. And so, we have to be careful, we don't mix the two where people will not receive from us because they're familiar with us as family, friends. "You're just like me so who are you to tell me how I should live or what I need to do? We are both the same." And so, "Familiarity breeds contempt," for sure.

But then in verse 58, continuing *a prophet is not without honor*, keep that theme in mind. They did not honor Him for who He really was. It says, in verse 58, **And He did not do there many works of power on account of their unbelief**. Again, **He did not do there many works of power on account of their unbelief**. Many have misunderstood this verse and, what it really means and the conclusions - they came to false conclusions.

Consequently, they develop false doctrine based on the misunderstanding of this one verse. They say that what happened was that Jesus came into town and He laid hands on people and prayed for them, but nothing happened because their lack of faith stopped it. Therefore, the same thing can happen to us, a lack of faith can stop Jesus. In other words, Jesus prayed for them, but because of their unbelief no miracle happened. That is not what the text says. They say, "The Lord can't work in your life with His many mighty works because of your unbelief." That is not what it says.

Notice, in the text itself, he did not say, "He could *do* no mighty work," but rather it says, "He did not do." Not, "He could not do," but, "He did not do." There's a big difference there. *Could not do* means that their lack of faith stopped His works of miracle power. *Did not do* means that Jesus Himself didn't even begin to do miracles in front of them because He saw them as having unbelief. It wouldn't have done any good. If Jesus Christ is doing the work, it has to happen. Period. If someone comes up to you and says, "I'm coming to you in the name of the Lord," and they pray over you and say, "In the name of Jesus be healed," or, "Let this happen," and nothing happens, it's not your fault. Nothing can stop the work of Christ. Listen to this though, nothing can stop the work of Christ, not even dead people can stop the work of Christ.

Because Jesus raised the dead. Where was their faith? It wasn't there. The person is dead. Gone.

In order to understand the text accurately, we need to understand two things about faith and miracles. So, this is a big day for us to establish this.

(1) First of all, miracles in the Bible are signs not promises. Miracles in the Bible are signs, they are not promises. Twenty-two times in the New Testament, for the word miracle is the Greek word **σημείον** (saymeion), which means a sign. A sign points you in a certain direction. It is not a promise. Signs are for nonbelievers. It is a physical manifestation of Christ revealing Himself through physical powers because they have not the Spirit of God.

For believers, II Corinthians 5:7 Paul says, "**We walk by faith not by sight.**" We walk by faith. Faith is the opposite of having to see, or having to feel, or having God to work in the physical realm.

In John chapter 12 for instance, John 12:37 it says, **But though Jesus had done so many miracles** (that's the word *signs*) **before them they did not believe in Him.** Even though He did bunch of signs the people did not believe.

In John 20:30-31 it says, **And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which have not been written in this book: But these are written, in order that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and in order that believing you might have life in his name.**

So, John lists the signs, so that people can see the signs that point them to Christ and that they might believe. But, as we just read from John 12:37, Jesus did many signs and the people did not believe, even though they saw the signs. Here in our text, signs would not have caused them to believe, that's what the text is saying. He did not do many mighty miracles there because they didn't believe. So, there's no sense in presenting signs, they're not going to believe. Jesus already knew that.

For instance, as in Luke 16:19-31, great text. This is The Rich man and Lazarus, you remember? It tells us that there was a beggar outside the rich man's door, and he waited for the rich man to come out and empty his garbage, so he could just get some food that would fall over the edges of the trash can, so that he could eat. Well, one day the beggar died, the poor man died, and he wound up in the bosom of Abraham. Well, the rich man also died, and he also was in this place called Hades with a great gulf between the two, a chasm between the two. On one side was Lazarus, the beggar, who is in the bosom of Abraham; on the other side of Hades, the rich man opened up his eyes and he was in torments. So, half of it was the torments of hell for those who rejected Christ, the other half were the Old Testament saints waiting for the coming of Christ. They are over in Abraham's bosom waiting, but they're not in torment. We've got these two compartments there in Hades.

And so, the rich man calls over to Abraham. Rich man, remember, rich man's in torment. He says, "Father Abraham, have Lazarus dip his finger in some water and send him over here and touch my tongue because I'm tormented in this flame." And Abraham says, "You can't come

here, and we can't come over there. Between you and us there is a great gulf fixed, so we can't do the transfer over back and forth." He says, "Well, if you are not going to send Lazarus over to give me some ease in my torment, send him (Lazarus) to my father's house. For I have five brothers and let him testify to them." He's dead, you know. "Let him come back from the dead and testify to my brothers, lest they come to this place of torment. Send Lazarus as a warning, so they don't come here, so that he can testify to them." But in Luke 16:29-31, Abraham's response was, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." They've got the Word of God. They can go to synagogue and listen to the Word of God. They don't need Lazarus to come back from the dead.

And he says, "No, Father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." See, he knows what they need to do, they need to repent. He says, "No, we don't listen to the Scriptures. We don't go to synagogue. We don't listen to the Scriptures." So, if somebody comes back from the dead and they see this person coming back from the dead, they will repent. Luke 16:31, Abraham says, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead." If you don't believe God's Word, you are not going to believe a miracle. You will just say, "Oh that's...." Let's say Lazarus did come back and appear to them. "Well, that's Lazarus, he was outside our brother's door waiting for something to eat. He's come back to haunt us because we didn't take care of him." And they make up some excuse. But, it's interesting that in this text a miracle would not help. Unbelief would not believe because of a miracle if there's no faith there.

So first of all, we want to understand from our text about faith and miracles. Remember, we're studying this the special study on faith and miracles. Miracles are called *signs* in the Bible, not promises.

(2) Secondly, unbelief cannot stop the work of the Lord. I made the statement, can't stop dead people, dead people can't stop the Lord's work. People who have unbelief cannot stop God's work. Period. And you say, "Well, where do you get that in the Scriptures?"

Well, first of all, in Luke 1:5-20, Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias was a priest and it came his time to serve in the temple. The priests served in courses. And a course of priests would serve twice a year for one week each. Well, Zacharias went there, and they were chosen by lots as to what their duties were to be. His lot was chosen to burn incense in the temple for the people. A priest might get to do that once in his lifetime. It is a very special occasion. So, Zacharias went in to burn incense.

We are told that he and Elizabeth were very old, elderly. She was barren, that is, she was sterile, unable to biologically reproduce. And so, he's in now the temple and he's burning incense, both advanced in the years. So, the people were outside waiting, because after he would burn the incense he would come out and pronounce the blessing upon the people. And while he was in burning incense an Angel appeared to him on the right side of the altar of incense. And the Angel says several things to Zacharias.

First of all, he says, "Fear not." You can imagine Zacharias was probably shocked and fearful right out of his shoes. But the angel says, "Fear not, your prayer is heard." Obviously,

they've been praying for a child all these years, and now they're well advanced in years and can't have children.

"And your wife will give birth to a son, and you will call his name John." This would be John the Baptist, for those of you keeping track of the timelines.

"You will have joy and gladness; and many will rejoice in his birth." The Angel is just saying, "This is a joyous time for you Zacharias. A miraculous thing has happened. God has heard your prayer, and your barren wife is going to give birth to a son, and he's going to be called John, and you're going to rejoice, your wife is going to rejoice, and everybody that knows about it is going to rejoice because of the function that this son will have."

"He will be great in the presence of the Lord, he will drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb. Many of the children of Israel will turn to the Lord their God. And he will go before them in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; for the purpose of making ready a people prepared for the Lord." He is going to go before the Messiah when He comes and prepare people for His coming. What a great announcement. How would you like to have one of those pronounced over one of your children as a great ministry that God has chosen?

So, in verse 18 of Luke chapter 1, Zacharias's response to the angel was, "Whereby shall I know this?" That's what the King James says. The Greek text, **Κατὰ τί γνώσομαι τοῦτο;** is "According to what shall I know this?" In other words, "I want a sign. How do I know what you're telling me is the truth? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in her years." In other words, "Physically this is impossible, so show me something that's going to tell me that the words that you're telling me are true."

So, Gabriel, that's the angel who was speaking to him, in verse 19 and 20 Gabriel answers. He says, "Zacharias," and I'm going to give you tone here. I'm going to give you tone because of the text itself. "I am Gabriel, and I have been standing in the presence of God." In other words, he is saying, "I'm no schlock angel here. I am right at the throne of God and He's given me a direct message to come here and bring this message to you, straight from God." You can tell he was a little ticked. "And I am sent to speak to you, to announce to you this good news." And then verse 20 of Luke chapter 1, "And behold you will be dumb (that is silent) and not able to speak until the day that these things will be performed." "You want a sign Zacharias? You got it! You are going to be silent and not able to speak until these things," notice, "*will be performed.*" His unbelief couldn't stop God from working. "Because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their time." So, with Zacharias we learn that unbelief cannot stop God's will from taking place. But what we do, is we can dictate to God what He must do to get us to line up with His will. Like with Zacharias, he was silenced for nine months and after John was born his tongue was loosed and he began to praise God. He now believed. But it didn't stop God from working.

Then there's an Old Testament story that parallels Zacharias and Elizabeth. The Old Testament story of Jonah. There is a four-chapter book of Jonah in the Old Testament that relates the story of Jonah the prophet.

In Jonah chapter 1, God gave Jonah a command to go to Nineveh. Nineveh was up north. The Ninevites were the enemies of Israel. And He's telling Jonah the prophet, "I want you to go up to the Ninevites and I want you to preach repentance to them." And Jonah is like, "They are our enemies and you want me to go? No way. No way am I going to do that." So, Jonah went down, he went south to Joppa to catch a ship to a place called Tarshish. He buys his ticket, gets on board ship and God says, "No, you went the wrong way. You are supposed to go north, and you went south," trying to get away. And so, while he was on board the ship and the ship was out in the sea, God caused a great storm to blow to the point that the ship was almost breaking in half, the storm was so violent. And the superstition of the crew on board, they said, "Let's get together and everybody pray to their God and we will cast lots and find out which one of us is the cause of the storm." And they cast lots and the lot fell on Jonah. Wouldn't you know it? And Jonah said, "Yeah, well, you're right. The reason I took shipping is because I'm running from the presence of the Lord." And they said, "What are we going to do? How are we going to save ourselves and our ship?" And so, Jonah says, "Well, just throw me overboard." So, they threw him overboard. And then God created a large fish, it doesn't say it's a whale. God created a large fish to swallow Jonah. The storm ceased for the people on board the ship, but now Jonah is in the belly of the great fish.

In Jonah chapter 2, Jonah prays a prayer of repentance and prays to God, admits that he has run from the presence of the Lord and has been disobedient. So, the fish vomited Jonah up on the dry land right near Nineveh.

In Jonah chapter 3, God gave the command again, "Okay, this is the second time I'm telling you to go to Nineveh and preach there." So, Jonah walks into the city gate. The city was so large it took three days to walk through the city, it was so large. 120,000 people there. Jonah is standing at the entrance to the city, seaweed wrapped around his neck, his skin all parched from being inside the fish, and he starts walking through the city. Everybody is looking at him like, "What is this?" And his message was, "In forty days the city will be destroyed if you do not repent. Forty days you have to repent, or you are going to be overthrown. Forty days..." He just walked through the city for three days giving the same message. And so, what happened? The city repented. All 120,000 people. Even the King of the Ninevites, he repented in sackcloth and ashes, took off his robes and put on sackcloth and put out a decree for the whole city to fast and to pray and to repent.

Chapter 4, the last chapter of Jonah, tells us the Jonah was not happy. That is putting it mildly. The English text tries to do him good by saying he was displeased. But he was angry. In fact, the Hebrew word means *inflamed*, he was so angry. So, after he went through the city for three days preaching repentance, he goes over and sits on the east side of the city on a hill overlooking the city, so angry, and so depressed he wanted to die. He said to God, "I know that You are a gracious God. I know that You're full of compassion and love. I knew You would save these people if they repented. I knew You would do that, and it bums me out." So, God says, "I'll tell you what. You are sitting on that hillside in that hot sun. I'm going to create a

gourd," as it's called in English, kikayown in Hebrew, which literally means *a shade tree*. Some kind of a shade tree, it doesn't give us the exact type. God created a shade tree to come up over Jonah and give him shade. That lasted one night, one day and one night. Then God created a worm to eat shade tree. Now, Jonah is really upset. "You killed off my shade tree and You brought this worm!" And then God brought in a hot east wind to blow through the city and to blow onto Jonah. And Jonah is just now beside himself. Jonah fainted and wished he were dead.

In verses 10 and 11 of Jonah chapter 4, God confronts Jonah and says, "Are you upset because I destroyed your shade tree? Are you upset because I destroyed the worm? Are you upset because I pretty much destroyed you? You are fainting and ready to die because of this hot wind coming in. If you're upset about that destruction, why would you not be upset about the destruction of 120,000 people?" All Jonah could think about is himself. He was more upset with God over the destruction of that shade tree than he was over 120,000 people that would not repent. And what is interesting about this whole thing, from the beginning to the end, from the time he was commanded to go and he rebelled against God and went in the other direction, it didn't stop God's will from being done. Even when he got to Nineveh, what an attitude! This message is not to approve of people that have bad attitudes, but God is going to accomplish His will whether you want to cooperate with Him or not.

You don't know how much the story of Jonah has helped me over the years, when I have been discouraged and basically said, "I want to quit. I'm finished." And yet, God went ahead and worked anyway. It had nothing to do with my faith or my beliefs. I didn't have any. I was in rebellion to God. Unbelief cannot stop the work of God, but our unbelief can dictate to God how he's going to deal with us, to get us to lineup with His will. I hope all this makes sense.

The teachings today that say that it's your lack of faith that is stopping God from performing miracles in your life; if you had the faith, He would perform the miracles. My faith doesn't cause the miracles. The miracles cause me to be pointed to Christ and even then, I might not believe.

In Philippians 1:6, Paul says, "Being confident of this very thing, that He which has begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." When God began a work in your life by saving you and coming into your life, He will continue it all the way to the end. He will not stop. Nothing can stop Him.

Hebrews 13:5, where Jesus said, "I will never leave you and I will never forsake you." Whether you have the faith or not, the Lord will be there.

So, in our text in Matthew 13:58, Jesus did not do miracles because they would not have believed if He did. Because signs and the miracles were supposed to be a sign to point a person to Christ. He saw the condition of their hearts. By saying, "If I performed miracles here, it wouldn't do any good, their heart will not believe." They did not honor Him for who He was. In fact, just to get technical for a second, I have to do this for my own sake if not for yours. But in verse 57, you remember the prophet without honor? The term *without honor* is the same verb form as in verse 58 *unbelief*. They were without belief. They were without belief because they were without honor. They didn't give Him the honor that was due to who He was.

So, I want you to understand that about miracles. Miracles are not promises. They are signs. And whatever God does, whatever the Lord Jesus Christ does, and whatever His will is for your life you cannot stop that from happening. But we can dictate to Him how He must deal with us to lineup with His will. But we can't stop Him. No one can stop Him.

Let's close with prayer.