

Confrontation in Galilee



SABBATH AFTERNOON

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS. “In the latter time he [God] will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined” (*Isa. 9:1, 2, RSV*). Jesus fulfilled this prophecy. Coming to a people broken by sin, sickness, ignorance, and poverty, He brought salvation, healing, and new life.

Jesus attracted a huge following in Galilee. For a while He was a sensation, but the storm clouds were gathering. Indeed, the movement reaches a critical point when Jesus feeds the 5,000. Enthusiasm builds to a crescendo as the people surge forward to crown Jesus as their king, but Jesus spurns the offer. Disappointed, many now turn away. And, in a grim foreshadowing of the events that await Jesus, Mark reminds us of the fate that befell John the Baptist, who also had been popular for a time.

The Week at a Glance: Why was Jesus rejected at Nazareth? What parallels existed between the actions of Herod and Pilate? Why did so many start turning away from Jesus? Why was Jesus so harsh against many of the religious traditions of His time?

Scripture Passage for the Week: *Mark 6:1–7:23.*

Memory Text: “For they all saw him, and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; have no fear’” (*Mark 6:50, RSV*).

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 30.

Confrontation at Nazareth (*Mark 6:1-5; see also Luke 4:16-30*).

News of Jesus and His miracles had spread all over Galilee, so the people of Nazareth had certainly heard about what He was doing. Nazareth was only a village at that time, with perhaps five hundred to six hundred people, and to have one of their number become famous must have led to a lot of talk among its inhabitants. Luke records that in His teaching Jesus said, “Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard you did in Capernaum’ ” (*Luke 4:23*).

Read carefully Mark 6:3. What are the people saying? Why are they saying it? Why do you think they reacted as they did? Didn’t they, on one level, have reasons to be skeptical?

Why were they so offended at Him? See Luke 4:16-30.

Australians have a colorful expression to describe the same sort of reaction expressed by the people in Jesus’ hometown. They call it “the tall poppy syndrome.” In a field of poppies, when one grows higher than the rest, people seek to cut it down. They don’t want someone to look better or feel better than the rest of them. A similar idea is found in Scandinavia in the term *Jante law*. This expresses an attitude to anyone in a leadership position who says: “Don’t think you are anything special. You are no better than we are. We put you in that position, and we can just as easily remove you.”

“[Jesus] could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith” (*Mark 6:5, NIV*). The people of Nazareth thought they knew all about Jesus: They had seen Him grow up, knew His parents, brothers, and sisters. To them He was one of them and not anyone special. They thought they knew Him but did not.

In what ways have you misjudged God? Why is it so easy for us, as sinners, to do just that? What lessons have you learned from those mistakes?

The Death of John *(Mark 6:14-22)*.

After the account of Jesus sending out the Twelve (*Mark 6:7-13*), Mark adds a detailed record of the circumstances of the death of John the Baptist. This is the only place in his Gospel where Mark diverts from the straight track of portraying Jesus the Man of action. At the outset of his Gospel, Mark gave a brief notice of John the Baptist as the messenger whom God raised up to announce the coming of the Messiah (*Mark 1:2-8*), and he does not mention him again until this point in his narrative. By the time Jesus sent out the Twelve, John had already been murdered, and King Herod speculated that the miracles wrought by Jesus were actually being done by John raised from the dead. The wicked ruler obviously had a troubled conscience over the death of God's servant.

Contrast the actions of Herod here with that of Pilate at the trial of Jesus. See *Matt. 27:11-30, Mark 15:2-20, Luke 23:2-25, John 18:28-38, 19:1-16*.

What role did guilt play in both?

How did both feel about sentencing to death their prisoners?

What role did the wives play in both cases?

What role did worldly kingly power play in both cases?

How were both men manipulated by others?

For Jesus, the news of John's murder and the disgraceful events surrounding it must have come with searching of heart. Not only was He grieved at the loss of His cousin and fellow worker but John's end foreshadowed His own. Ahead of Jesus lay not the executioner's sword but the cross.

In looking at some of the characteristics that both Pilate and Herod displayed, can you see some of the same things in yourself? If so, how can you change? How can you be protected from letting these weaknesses ruin you too?

The Turning Point *(Mark 6:33-46).*

Read Mark's account of the feeding of the five thousand. Study also the parallel account of this event in John 6:1-15, noting especially verses 14, 15. What additional light do you find? Why did Jesus not want them to make Him a king? (See John 3:14, 7:8, 18:36.) After all, wasn't Jesus the King?

John tells us the result of Jesus' refusal to be crowned king: "From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him" (*John 6:66, NIV*). In other words, the people became discouraged; their hopes and expectations were dashed; their preconceived notions about whom this Man was weren't fulfilled. And thus, they turned away from Him.

Recount a time in which you turned away from either a person, an organization, whatever, because your expectations weren't met. Were your expectations wrong, or even unrealistic? Should you have done more thinking beforehand? What did you learn from this experience?

In our zeal to win converts, are we not in danger of giving people false expectations about what being a Christian is all about? Should we be promising people that they'll suddenly be happy, fulfilled, healthy, and prosperous if they accept Jesus and join our church? We do have wonderful Bible promises, but these must be kept in context and oftentimes balanced with other texts that let us know the Christian life can sometimes be a struggle, that there are trials, temptations, and suffering along the way. (See Acts 14:22; 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.)

What false expectations, if any, did you have regarding what it means to be a Christian, a follower of Christ, and even an Adventist? How did you work through them? What advice would you give to someone who is struggling because of false expectations about either the church or God or both?

Jesus Walks on the Water *(Mark 6:45-56).*

Considering the events depicted in yesterday's lesson, why do you think Jesus chose that particular time to do such an incredible miracle such as walking on the water? What does that tell us about how the Lord will give us what we need to have faith, if we are open to accept it?

After Jesus had walked over the water and entered the boat, it says that the disciples were astonished at what happened. The Greek verb means "astonished beyond comprehension." According to Mark, they didn't consider the miracle of the fish and the loaves, because their hearts were hardened. Even after such an incredible miracle, they still didn't get it.

Review the events in the first six chapters of Mark, up until Christ's walking on the water. What miracles did Jesus perform, and why should they have caused His followers to fully believe in Him? At the same time, what things happened that could have caused them to doubt whom He was? What lessons can we draw from this about faith, about how we get it, about how we maintain it, and about how we could lose it?

As sinful human beings, our natural inclinations are toward evil, toward selfishness, toward sin; thus, it's not natural for us to lean toward a God who is good, selfless, and sinless. No matter what God does for us, no matter how great a view of the Cross we have, no matter what miracles He has done for us, if we don't guard our souls, if we don't cultivate faith, nourish faith, practice faith, and live by faith, our hearts can become hard. Our natural trajectory is downward, earthward, toward self, toward sin, toward death. Only by daily grasping the hand of God, by faith, can we stop the natural downward progression.

Go back over your own walk with the Lord. How were you first converted? What has God done for you since then? Dwell on these things, cling to these things, and pray for the Holy Spirit to purge you of all doubts because of whatever things you don't understand.

Confrontation With the Pharisees *(Mark 7:1-23)*.

Read carefully and prayerfully the above texts. If you were asked to summarize, in one sentence, the basic message of the passage, what would you write?

What one passage in these set of verses do you believe catches the essence of what Jesus is saying here? Why did you choose this one text?

Oftentimes critics of religion claim that religion is a man-made construct used to give a certain class of people power over another class. And yet, and here's the irony, this is exactly what Jesus is dealing with. These rituals were being used to help consolidate the power and wealth of the priestly class over and against others.

For instance, God had given instructions regarding defilement in the book of Leviticus, but many more regulations had been added over the centuries. The effect was to exclude more and more of the common people—the sick, maimed, infirm, lepers, and those who did not measure up to the regulations of ritual purity—from the temple services, leaving it, and the power that came with it, in the hands of a small select group.

It's a scary thought (and it should be) that Jesus spent so much of His time fighting, not against pagans or skeptics or agnostics but against very religious people who believed that they were defending their faith. It's scary, too, that in their zeal to defend the commandments of God they actually produced traditions and commandments that at times nullified the commandments they were supposed to be protecting (*see Mark 7:1-11*).

The greatest motive in the world is to do things out of love for God. At the same time, it's also potentially the most dangerous of all motives. Why is that so? Why must those who believe that they are acting in behalf of their God be very careful in what they do in God's "behalf"?

Further Reading: Read Ellen G. White's "The First Evangelists," "Come Rest Awhile," "Give Ye Them to Eat," "A Night on the Lake," "The Crisis in Galilee," and "Tradition," in *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 349–371, 377–398.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** In class, have people relate some times where they, believing they were acting in behalf of God, now believe that they made a mistake. What did they do? How did they treat people? What might they have done differently if they knew what they know now? What lessons did they learn that might be able to help others from making the same mistakes?
- 2** What did Jesus mean in Mark 7:20 about defilement? How is Jesus defining defilement here? How is it different from how the rabbis seemed to understand defilement? What principle is made manifest by this difference?
- 3** Jesus spoke very harshly about human traditions. Do you think He was against tradition? If not, why the hard words? What are some of your traditions? Where did they originate from? How do they stand in contrast to the "commandments of God"? Might some of your traditions need to be examined in the context of what Jesus said in Mark 7? How would they fare?

Summary: For many months Jesus has enjoyed huge popular support in Galilee, but a change is coming. We see Him, first of all, rejected by His own people and then by even larger crowds. And we see Jesus confronting the religious establishment in His strongest rebuke to date. No niceties of expression, no mincing of words: These leaders, so proud of their strict observances, are really lawbreakers; their profession is a sham, a hypocrisy.

Jesus is indeed heading toward the Cross.

The French Exam

Ludmilla Mladenova

Lucy is a university student in Bulgaria. She and her brother are the only Adventists in their family. Sometimes they found it difficult sharing their faith with their parents.

Lucy was struggling with a French class that she had to complete in order to graduate. Many of the students in her class knew far more French than she did, and she wondered if she would ever catch up. At the end of the first grading period, the teacher announced that the exam would have two parts—written and oral. They would take the written exam together, but each student would take the oral exam individually.

One of Lucy's friends in the class asked to take the oral exam first because she had an appointment. After the exam, she stopped to see Lucy. She told Lucy that the teacher asked her to choose one of five topics to discuss orally. She discussed the topic she had chosen and how she thought she had done on her exam.

After her friend left, Lucy wrestled with her conscience. Should she study this one question? No, that would be cheating. She decided to ignore what her friend had told her and let the teacher choose the discussion topic for her. Lucy continued preparing for the oral exam as if she had heard nothing her friend had said.

When she arrived to take the test, the teacher asked her to discuss the same question that her friend had been given. She was surprised at how easily the ideas came to her in French. Words that she had never remembered learning flowed from her mouth. When she finished the oral exam, she thanked God that she had trusted Him to lead her.

Later Lucy learned that her friend had told several other students what her topic of discussion was, and the teacher suspected that they knew. She was glad that she had asked the teacher to select the topic for her.

When the exam results were posted, Lucy's grade was near the top of her class. For some students the exam was a disaster; for Lucy, it was a wonderful affirmation of faith and honesty.



Ludmilla Mladenova (left), as Lucy, continues to study in Sofia, Bulgaria.