

Sermon Draft

Text: Mark 6:1–6

Sermon: “Listen”

Do you remember the logo for RCA. It pictures a small black and white dog, head cocked quizzically, looking into the horn of an old Victrola record player. You may even know the name of that picture— “His Master’s Voice.” But have you ever wondered why the dog looks confused about his master’s voice? RCA doesn’t generally tell you, but I will.

The dog is confused because the Victrola and the dog are sitting on a casket. It sounds ghastly, but that’s the way the original picture was painted. The dog’s master is dead, but his voice lives on, coming via the record to a perplexed dog. While the dog knows and recognizes his master’s voice, we so often forget ours. We seek worldly wisdom, not God’s power.

That's nothing new. Many people who should have followed the Master's voice gladly and enthusiastically have looked to earthly wisdom for their salvation. Centuries before Jesus appeared at the Nazareth synagogue, God came to the prophet Ezekiel. He instructed his prophet to deliver a call to heartfelt repentance. Along with his directions, God also gave Ezekiel a warning against the major frustration that would come delivering that message. God said, ***"I am sending you to the Israelites, to a rebellious nation, that has rebelled against me; they and their fathers have been in revolt against me to this very day. The people to whom I am sending you are obstinate and stubborn"*** (Ezekiel 2:3–4). Even then people wanted worldly wisdom, not God's power. It is not necessary for me to tell you that Ezekiel's message, like those of so many of his compatriots, went unheard and unheeded for the most part.

Having spent hundreds of years ignoring scores of prophets and leaving a multitude of messages unheard until God's power struck, you might think God's people would have learned to listen. They didn't. Immediately before Jesus' birth, the priest Zechariah found it hard to accept the Lord's prediction that his son would be the forerunner of Jesus (Luke 1:18). Then, King Herod believed his minuscule might could outmaneuver the Almighty's plan of salvation (Matthew 2:16–20). Both these fellows learned that God was in control.

Now, years later, at the start of Jesus' ministry, look what happens when he and his disciples returned to his hometown of Nazareth. Jesus was a local boy making good. Miracles were being performed, messages were being delivered, and multitudes were being touched by the Savior. Word of these exploits had filtered back to Nazareth.

And although the people were proud of his performances, no doubt many of his friends paraphrased the disciple Nathanael by asking, ***“Can anything this good come out of Joseph the carpenter’s family?”***

Nevertheless, on Saturday, the Sabbath, the leaders of the synagogue did what was right and proper. They asked Nazareth’s famous son to come forward to read from and expound upon Scripture. Deliberately, Jesus read Isaiah’s words of prophecy pertaining to the Messiah. During the time allotted for amplifying and applying the text, Jesus announced, Isaiah’s powerful prophecies had been fulfilled, right now, right then, right there in their midst.

The citizens of Nazareth reacted in a predictable way. To say they were displeased with their old friend and boyhood comrade is an understatement. They certainly did not offer him the key to the city. They had no parade or named no street after him.

On their minds and hearts, they hung out a sign that read, “Do Not Disturb.” They were guided by worldly wisdom that ignores Christ’s power to save. So strong was their rejection of the Lord and what he wished to do among them, so powerful was their desire to silence him, that they tried to murder their ex-friend right then and there. Some might be surprised, but Jesus wasn’t. After all, murdering prophets was almost a national tradition (Matthew 23:31).

Now centuries later, although physically murdering a resurrected Savior is out of the question, many people in their “wisdom” look for salvation from their own strength rather than the power of Christ. The desire to embrace worldly wisdom has resulted in a populace that has no beliefs or ethical boundaries. Worldly wisdom says, “Cheat on your taxes but don’t get caught. Cheat on your wife but don’t get AIDS.” Worldly wisdom says, “Vacate your values, cancel your commitment, ignore your integrity.”

The craving for worldly wisdom has, all too often, made us into double-talkers, where truth and virtue are only for the dweebs, losers, and nerds. We have sugarcoated sin to make it appear acceptable. Lying has become “stretching the truth.” Cheating is “bending the rules.” Lusting is “healthy admiration.” Hatred becomes “dislike.” Gossiping is only “harmless talk.” Envy is “appreciating what others have.” Murder is a “big mistake.” Drug abuse is “an unfortunate misdirection.” Gluttony is “lack of will power.” A violent individual is “temperamental.” Child molesters are “unstable or antisocial.” Homosexuals are “practicing a God-given alternate lifestyle.” And children who are disobedient to parents, bless their hearts, are “strong willed.” We want worldly wisdom, not the Savior’s power that calls the lost from darkness to light.

Can no one see that without Christ we are, in many ways, like the Titanic steaming away oblivious to the dangers around us?

The Titanic had received one warning after another. The messages that told them they were sailing into an ice field were ignored. In fact, when a nearby ship sent an urgent caution, the radioman on the Titanic was talking to shore about what time chauffeurs were to meet passengers at the dock. He was sharing menus to be prepared for “welcome home dinners” that would never be served. Preoccupied with trivia, the Titanic responded to the radio warnings: “Shut up. You are jamming my signal.” Two thousand years ago that was the response of Nazareth to the Savior. “Shut up, Jesus. You are upsetting our plans.” It is also the response of this modern age to the Son of God. “Do not bother us, Lord. We want worldly wisdom, not the Savior’s powerful blood to rescue us from damnation.” If that is what people want, that is just what the Lord might give them.

When God’s Old Testament people shut their ears to the prophets who spoke God’s message of repentance, the Lord did not force them to hear.

He allowed them to follow their own path, worship their man-made gods, and commit their own transgressions. Scripture records, in vivid detail, how worldly wisdom led them to be defeated in war, carried off into captivity, and left without hope.

When Jesus' neighbors in Nazareth shut their ears to his message of salvation, he did not demand that they hear him. He did not call down legions of angels to strike down the doubters. He did not perform one miracle after another until they were forced to admit he was God's Son. Jesus allowed them to reject him. And that day, when he walked through the Nazareth crowd that threatened to kill him, he did so with finality. Never again would he come to that community or preach to that city. Never again would he call them to a new covenant of God's grace and forgiveness.

What will the Lord do with us and our country? With history's record so clear, we have to ask, how long will he continue to reach out and preach to people when Bibles are forbidden in classrooms but placed in jail cells?

We cannot know whether the time will be long or short, but Christians should know it's the right time to get their priorities in order. It is time for us to join together and follow the Savior even as we reject the world's wisdom.

Sure, we enjoy what the world offers. We like the toys, the gadgets, and gimmicks, the riches, power, and fame. But if these things interfere with our love for God, if they displace God, we gladly leave them behind without a second thought.

That's what Jesus did for us. Saving us from sin, death, and Satan was the Savior's first priority. Saving us was more important than having his hometown love him. Saving us was more important than having the crowds follow him. Saving us was more important than saving himself from death on the cross. That is why we do not hesitate to say, "Our first priority is to honor and thank the Lord. Everything else is in second place." Keeping the Lord as first priority, Christians cannot hold on to anything that separates us from God's love and power.

Having heard the Savior's words of peace, having seen him fulfill every prophecy, having watched his powerful sacrifice on Calvary's cross, we gladly make his mission our own. His desire to save lost souls becomes our desire. We may never be called on to make a great witness, but we can give a steady one. Although we may never powerfully preach eloquent sermons before great crowds, we can quietly whisper his name. Although we may not die for Jesus, we can live for him. Although we may never perform a miracle, we can, by faithful following, do that which shows true Christian commitment. It is the steady sun, not the lightning, that illuminates this world. It is the regular rain, not the damaging downpour, that waters the field. And it is our daily faithfulness that God uses to shape and influence this world. This we can do in Christ's power but not in worldly wisdom.

Amen