

Prophets Without Honour

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Preacher: Warwick Grant

[0 : 0 0] This is the AM service on July 13th, 1997. The preacher is Warwick Grant.

The sermon is entitled Prophets Without Honor and is from Matthew chapter 13, verse 54 to Matthew 14, verse 12.

We're standing, let's pray. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are the name above all names. You're the one who is Emmanuel, who is with us.

And we pray that through your Bible this morning, you would teach us more about your love for us. In Jesus' name we pray this. Amen. Please be seated. Well, I attended secondary school here in Melbourne at an Anglican school at Camberwell Grammar School and I did Year 12 in 1981.

That's not to say I passed Year 12, but I did Year 12 in 1981. And last year, 1996, was the 15th anniversary of my final year at Camberwell Grammar.

[1 : 1 8] And on such an anniversary, the school has begun the habit of organising reunions for its past students. I think part of their motivation is to say, if you have any sons, send them to our school.

But it is quite nice to catch up with old friends and acquaintances, many of whom you haven't seen for 15 years. And of a possible hundred or so students that could have turned up to this reunion, about a third of them came along.

So it was a pretty good turn up, I felt. It was really weird to see some of these people again. It's almost like a time warp as you see some people, as I say, for the first time in some cases for 15 years or so.

A number of them have glasses and they never used to. A number of them have a lot less hair than they used to. Others have a lot more girth than they used to.

And as you settle down to a drink, you begin to hear what they've been doing with their lives over the past 15 years. Their families, some of them are married and with children.

[2 : 2 2] Some are a tradesman. Others are now engineers, doctors and other professional people. Some have become secondary school teachers. And some of those teachers are teaching back in the old school.

I've always wondered what it must be like to go back to your old school, having been a student there and now being a teacher there.

To share the same staff room with staff who taught you. To have those that you formally addressed as, sir, as your colleagues.

I don't know, I think it'd be quite difficult. I'd find it quite unusual. I think for my old school friends who are now teaching there, it's not too bad. But you wonder if some of the senior staff really take them seriously.

Maybe they still see them as those little kids in shorts that they remember from 15 years ago. Well, this was similar to the situation that confronted Jesus when he turned up to his hometown of Nazareth and he taught in the local synagogue.

[3 : 27] If you want to follow with me, I'm on page 795, page 795 of the Bibles in the seats in front of you. And we're looking at Matthew chapter 13, verse 54.

Now, we're not told explicitly in this passage that Jesus' hometown was Nazareth. But we know that this is the town that is referred to. You'll remember that Jesus was, of course, born in Bethlehem, but he had to flee to Egypt because of the persecution of King Herod.

But once Herod had died, Jesus and Joseph and Mary went back to the Holy Land, to Nazareth. Now, the synagogue was like the centre of life of the community, much in the same way that people would say the church used to be the centre of the community's life.

One of its purposes was a place for teaching. Now, we don't know how Jesus came to be teaching in the synagogue on this particular day.

But often synagogue officials would sort of invite a visiting preacher to come through and preach in the synagogue proceedings. What was the result of Jesus' teaching that morning?

[4 : 45] We're told that the people were astounded. And they said things like, where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power?

They were suitably impressed by Jesus' teaching and perhaps had heard about his miracles or his deeds of power, as they're called. And they knew that he couldn't have got this stuff from his upbringing in dumpy little Nazareth.

And let's face it, Nazareth was a hole. It really was. That's a very accurate way to describe it. Nazareth, the town, still exists. I've been there. It's a lot bigger than it used to be. But it used to be just a very, very small place.

A dump. I began to wonder, can you imagine what it would be like if I was to say that next week we'd manage to secure the services of Jesus himself as our guest preacher?

The Son of God would be standing in this pulpit preaching to us. Wouldn't that be great to have God himself speak to us? As Christians, we believe he does speak to us every week through his Bible.

[5 : 54] But I think you know what I'm saying. If he turned up in person to speak to us, I mean, that'd be fantastic. I mean, you'd think Paul's a great preacher. We'd have Jesus. Well, on that day in the synagogue at Nazareth, God himself was the guest preacher.

And we're told by Matthew that they took offense at him. They had God in their very midst and they rejected him.

Sure, they were astounded, but that was because Jesus didn't fit their preconceived ideas. They began to cut him down to a more comfortable and understandable size.

In verse 55, they ask, Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?

Are not his sisters with us? And Jesus did have brothers and sisters. Mary had and Joseph had children after Jesus was born. Where did this man get all this?

[7 : 02] They simply identified Jesus with his earthly family. But in their minds, he's just a villager. He's just a little kid who grew up in Nazareth. They would have remembered him growing up.

And in their minds, that's how they want him to stay. Jesus goes on to point out that a prophet such as himself is often rejected first and foremost by those who know him the best.

And sadly, we're told in verse 58, he did not do many deeds of power there because of their unbelief. I don't think that's saying that Jesus wasn't able to do any miracles because of their unbelief, because of the lack of faith of the people.

There are many stories of Jesus performing healings and the faith of the people around was not an issue. But Jesus never went around trying to impress people by doing miracles and wonders.

Often if people had a little bit of faith, he would do a miracle or a healing to encourage that faith. But he never tried to impress people into following him and believing in him.

[8 : 12] And certainly when there was outright rejection and hostility, as there was in the synagogue on this day, miracles were unlikely to be performed. So all that has taken place in Nazareth, which is in the northern part of present-day Israel, to the west of the Sea of Galilee.

And now our story turns down south to the eastern side of the Dead Sea, to a place called Machaerus. Machaerus, there was a prison there and Herod had one of his palaces there.

And this is where the story about John the Baptist's death takes place. Herod had ordered John's death, as we're about to hear.

When he heard reports about Jesus, he had assumed that John the Baptist had come back to life. This is what King Herod thought. Now this Herod is one of the sons of Herod the Great, the Herod who ordered the killing of the babies in Bethlehem.

In verse 3 we read, For Herod had arrested John, bound him, and put him in prison on account of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, because John had been telling him, It is not lawful for you to have her.

[9 : 34] Basically what had happened here was that Herodias had left her husband, Herod Philip, for this Herod. To add to the situation, both her first and second husbands were her uncle.

If you were trying to work out Herod's family tree, it's just a really complex tangled web. In simplicity, there was Herod the Great who had a number of sons. One of the sons had this daughter, Herodias, she married one of her uncles, got sick of him, and married another uncle.

That's an incredible simplicity, and it's even more complex than that. Well, in any case, Herod's current marriage to Herodias was against the Old Testament law, and John the Baptist did not hesitate to remind Herod and Herodias of that fact.

And John, as a prophet, spent his whole ministry calling people back to God, calling on them to repent, to turn away from their sinful lives, back towards God.

And he even didn't stop with the king and Herodias. He told them to turn back. They didn't like it one little bit. Herod wanted to have John the Baptist killed.

[10 : 51] He was a nuisance. He was a liability. But Herod was politically astute and knew that killing such a popular prophet would not help his own popularity.

Well, in verse 6 of chapter 14, we're told that Herod had a birthday party, and Herodias' daughter, Salome, probably only a teenager, danced for those who were assembled.

I think we can safely assume it was a very suggestive dance, and Herod, probably slightly intoxicated, was delighted with her performance. In an incredibly impulsive act, he promised on oath to give her whatever she might ask.

In those days, when you made such a promise on oath, you were really bound to keep it, and such a promise couldn't be broken. Herodias prompted her daughter to request the head of John the Baptist on a platter.

Herod was not pleased with this request, and yet he had made an unbroken, a promise that could not be broken. It wasn't his desire to kill John, as I said, but he didn't want to break this oath that he had made, because it had been made in the presence of so many guests and witnesses.

[12 : 09] He knew that killing John was the wrong thing to do. He knew that John's message was correct, that his own marriage to Herodias was wrong. Yet he went ahead, excuse the pun, with the execution, because of the promise that he had made on oath.

Verse 10 and 11, we read that, He sent and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought on a platter and given to the girl who brought it to her mother.

It's a disgustingly gruesome scene, one that makes you sick to even think about. And yet God's prophets have always met with opposition from those who are evil.

Such opposition has even led them to their death, as it did with John the Baptist. The sad thing is that Herod knew that what he was doing was the wrong thing.

He knew that John the Baptist was saying the right things and yet he went ahead with his execution. We can probably all remember incidents in our own lives where we know the right thing to do and yet we haven't done it.

[13 : 21] I can remember an incident at my school when I was in about year 10. And at school, once a week, these big trucks came in to clear and empty the dump master.

If you don't know what a dump master is, it's a great big skip that you put rubbish and junk in and every week this thing came in and backed up and lifted this big skip full of all the rubbish and chipped it into the back of the truck and drove off.

And this was sort of normally happened around lunchtime. And I can remember one lunchtime I was in about year 10 or form 4 and because it was lunchtime everyone's school bags were all over the place.

And there was one particular bag that was in the path of this truck and a number of us were just standing around eating our lunch and we were all just watching this truck to see what was going to happen and just kept on reversing and reversing and reversing and no one had the guts to move the bag.

Everyone was looking at this bag probably privately hoping the truck would run over it which it did. And they were just everyone knew and to my own shame I didn't have the guts to go and move that bag and I wish I had.

[14 : 30] But everyone was just sort of reduced to bowing into peer pressure and just standing back. And the truck ran over the bag probably damaged everything in it including calculators and lunch and all sorts of things and someone went and told the owner of the bag what had happened.

But I just sort of had a terrible feeling afterwards. I knew what I should have done and I didn't do it. I wish I'd made a stand and retrieved my schoolmate's bag before it was run over.

I knew it was the right thing to do but I didn't do that. Well, wherever we find ourselves in our lives in our workplace our families our communities we need to make a stand for what is right what we know is right to not worry about what other people think to only be wanting to please God and to not just go with the flow as Herod did.

Let's pray that Jesus is the one that we seek to please and honour and not those around us. Let's pray. Lord God we do not want to be unreceptive as the people in Jesus' hometown were when he came and spoke in the synagogue.

Lord we acknowledge that each week you do come and speak to us through your word to us the Bible. We pray Lord that we would be open to hear and understand week by week whatever it is that you have to say to us.

[16 : 00] Help us to hold you in honour and what you have to teach us. And Lord we pray that this might flow out through our lives in obedience in standing against the tide of sin and evil that is in our world for standing up for what is right for what is good and not being backward about that.

Please give us the strength Lord against many pressures to stand firm and hold out against the evil around us. We ask this in your son's name. Amen. Amen. God bless you.

God bless you. God bless you. God bless you.

Thank you.