



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

Sermon: Aiden Sibrava

14 March 2021

Familiarity breeds Contempt

It's been said that "familiarity breeds contempt". And that's true for bona-fide prophets of God, as much as it is for us.

It's a *shocking* Bible passage we're thinking about today as both Jesus and John are treated *very* badly. These twin heralds of the kingdom of God are treated *so much worse* than they deserve. You see, they're the ones who are saying, "the kingdom (of blessing) is near" and "the kingdom (of promise) is at hand". Jesus has told us what the kingdom is like in his parables... These are important people, with an exciting and compelling message of hope...and yet both are mistreated. They're put down, pulled down and they're murdered, even though they preach an exciting message of hope.

Can you relate to that? Because *you* have an exciting message of hope, don't you? But tell me, what happened when—in your excitement—you shared it with others those first few times? You learn they're not always as excited about the kingdom as you, are they?

Well today we'll see that God's kingdom *is* sometimes rejected... but I want you to remember, *that's not the end* of the story.

So let's see what happens. First, Jesus moves on from his parables. And he goes to preach in Capernaum. "*Kfar Naḥūm*", *Village of Comfort*, it's in the North of Israel, on the top of the Sea of Galilee. Closer to Rome, far from Jerusalem, this was *not* the place where Jewish nobility lived. But about 1500 people *did* live there. And so did Jesus. Matthew 4:13 says he'd moved there from Nazareth and here in this passage we get a snapshot of his teaching ministry there.

Capernaum had a Great Synagogue, an important building where people went to learn about God. And there was a fair chance that they *would* learn about God (if they had ears to hear), because Jesus himself preached there. *And if you're going to learn about*

God from anyone... But...it's not that simple. Because in this passage, we see that instead of hearing Jesus with the awe you'd expect, the people who hear him preach in the Great Synagogue actually pull him down.

Verse 54 says that as they listened to Jesus, they were *ekplessetai*—they were stunned. They say, “Where'd this one get his wisdom and power? Isn't this the carpenter's kid? And his mum's name is Mary, and his brothers are Jacob and Joseph and Simon and Judah? And his sisters are here too? So where did he get all of this!!?” And verse 57 says they were *scandalised* by him.

Do you see what they've done? They've said, “*We know this guy - who does he think he is?*” And it's like they think they can 'get a grip on' Jesus by saying they know all his family. It's like, he's not some visionary madman survivor, wandered in from the desert with a pistol on his hip and a gleam in his eye; no, [...] this is Jesus - - we played soccer with his brothers. They're saying he's familiar. He's not some visionary; we know this guy! And you know the saying - *familiarity breeds contempt*. Familiarity breeds contempt. They're offended at Jesus, because he's too big for the box they've got for him and they don't like it.

And Jesus says, verse 57, that'd be right. “There is no prophet without honour...except in his home town, and in his own home.” Familiarity breeds contempt. Prophets are *feared* when they're wild men. If a bloke came up to you on the train dressed in a coffee bag, performing great signs and yelling about the darkening of the sun and the end of all things, you'd be fearful for one or two reasons. Unless he was your brother, in which case you'd probably say, “*Sit down, Marvin, you're embarrassing yourself!*” Which is fair enough...unless the prophet is right and God has actually spoken, which *is* possible, however improbable. Prophecy is real, but familiarity breeds contempt. And that's what happened to Jesus.

And verse 58 says he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.

Now we could say lots about that, but I'm going to say just two things: 1) I don't think Jesus lacked the ability; 2) What causes God to respond to us in blessing and forgiveness? Is it the good works we've done? Does God bless us and save us because we're so good? No, he does those things because of *faith alone*. So I'm not surprised that their lack of faith met a lack of blessing. They didn't honour Jesus. What do you *think* happens? The prophet is not honoured in his home town.

And what about John? John's story is even heavier because it follows, but it's a flashback. But it totally follows from what Jesus said. Jesus talks about dishonoured prophets; the very next story tells of a prophet who was murdered...and all on the whim of a flirty princess. It's a horrifying story and an *example* of how God's prophets are dishonoured by others.

Chapter fourteen, verse 1: *At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus' [miracles],² and he said to his attendants, 'This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him.'* It's hard to pick tone from text, but I *think* Herod's tone is deep-seated fear if he really believes this is John back from the dead, because Herod and John are *not* on good terms.

Check the backstory. Verse 3 says what had happened was that Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias. Herodias was Herod's sister-in-law, and John had been saying to Herod: 'She's your brother's wife. It is not OK for you to have her.' [We're told] Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

On Herod's birthday Herodias' daughter, Herod's niece, danced for his birthday guests. And she pleased Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. So she goes to mum. And mum says, tell Herod: 'I want John's head, on a plate.' The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his

dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison.

Isn't that awful? I mean it's disgusting. [It's like something out of Underbelly.] It's incestuous. And it's *wrong*. Because John was right! You *can't* have your brother's wife! Marriage is not for sharing—not like *that*. And then his niece does a dance that pleases him, Herod promises her half the kingdom - Gag! - and she says, "Give me John's head, because mummy's tired of being told this is wrong." I mean talk about 'family values'—*they have none!* And so Herod kills John. A man whose crime was telling the truth and turning people back to God.

It's disgusting. It's tragic. It's *awful*.

It's what happens to prophets.

And...*may I point out...*it's what happened to Jesus. Except that was *so much worse*. He wasn't just killed by a king trying to fill up his bed with family members; no, Jesus was rejected, beaten, mocked, scorned, abused and then murdered by his own people, *though he had done no wrong and no deceit was found in his mouth*. They were happy for him to die as an outlaw, hung naked on a Roman cross, broken and choking, abandoned by all but a few women.

But then what happened?

Well there was darkness at midday. On the day Jesus died, Matthew 26:45 says there was darkness from noon until 3, when Christ gave up his Spirit. A little warning from God that "*this action has consequences...*" And then Christ died. He was laid in the tomb... And he rose on the third. And he ascended into heaven, from where he will come again in glory to judge the quick and the dead (as the Creed says).

You see, God's kingdom *is* sometimes rejected... We all know that, and that's part of all of our stories too, at least to some extent. But

that's not the end of the story. Because God will vindicate his kingdom—and those who are part of it.

That's why I think Herod was scared. Remember, his attendants told him about Jesus and he said: "This is John - he is risen - that's why he works miracles!" I mean, you'd be scared if you did what he did and thought God had raised John. And the truth is, Herod was only a little bit 'out'. Because Christ *was* raised. And John *will* be raised. And everyone who trusts in Christ will be raised to life in him.

So... What does this mean for you, if you're here and you're Christian?

1. Expect opposition, push-backs, frustration. Jesus said, "a prophet is not without honour, except in their hometown, and in their own home." Your friends and family are *not* going to hear you talk about Jesus as judge and as saviour and fear. They're going to say, "Who are you - and what have you done with my brother, or sister, or friend?" It happened to Jesus, and it'll happen to us. Jesus said somewhere: "If they treated the master this way, will they not also treat the master's servants in the same way?" So what will you do when you face it? Will you be surprised? Shocked and offended and hurt? Or will you say, "Jesus said this would happen," and pray through it?
2. "Familiarity breeds contempt." We are often very familiar with the stories of Jesus, aren't we? You know, for a little while now I've noticed a faraway land which would say it is full of Christians, on the right and the left. And yet for all their professed familiarity with God...I've noticed, some don't do what he says: "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God." But is that just an "over there" problem, or is that sometimes an "in here" problem, in my own heart? Here's my challenge to me and to us: "familiarity breeds contempt"—can we drop our assumptions, and pride, and self-righteousness,

and listen to Jesus without pre-empting what he wants to say to us? I think that would help us. As he speaks to us through his word, by his Spirit, in prayer, and in the ministry of others; let's not take him for granted. This isn't just Mary's kid; he's the Lord of Lords.

3. And the final application - the prophets *were* and *are* dishonoured in this life - John, Jesus, and many of you also. But...that's not the end of the story. God will do justice. And he raised Jesus to be our living hope, an emblem of that future day. So will you wait for God's justice and pray for those who persecute? That they might stand at our side?

But what about the non-Christian? What's in this story for you?

1. Herod feared John had been raised from the dead. And it's a right fear; it's just early. The resurrection of Jesus means that death is not the end and there is a day of justice. You want to be on Jesus' side on that day. He went through what he went through so that we could be forgiven when we trust in him, so we're ready for that day of God's justice. That's the first thing.
2. But If you become a Christian, it won't always be easy, and people won't always want to hear about the joy and the love and the sense of forgiveness and lightness of soul that you have in Jesus. In some parts of the world, they will kill you. And your family might think that you're crazy. But you'll have confidence in Christ and a church family who love you.



KIAMA ANGLICAN
CHURCHES