

HONOUR OUGHT TO BEGIN AT HOME!

Today's Text: Matt. 13: 53-58

Extracts:

When [Jesus] had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" So they were offended at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house." Now He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief [Matt. 13: 54-58]

Nigeria's film and video production industry is popularly referred to as Nollywood, a name apparently inspired by a similar industry in America (Hollywood) and India (Bollywood). On Tuesday, 5 May 2009, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO) declared Nollywood the world's second largest film producer, behind India's Bollywood and ahead of America's Hollywood.¹ The ranking was based on a global cinema survey conducted by UNESCO's Institute of Statistics Nigerian films have become very popular among Africans on the continent and Africans-in-Diaspora in Europe, North America and the Caribbean countries. Recently, a daily U.S. government bulletin referenced Nollywood as a rising star in the world of film production and paid tribute to the acumen of Nigerian artists and film producers.

But back home in Nigeria, there is hardly an enabling environment for the industry, such as reliable infrastructure or bank credit. Instead, young Nigerian producers are struggling on their limited resources to assemble talented actors and actresses to meet production and marketing/distribution deadlines at home and abroad. Why is the propaganda-driven government not supporting an industry that has given such a positive image to Nigeria instead of wasting scarce resources on false claims in foreign media? Why are Nigerian investors not bullish on the growing stature of that industry instead of hoarding stolen wealth abroad? The answer may be because honour, unlike charity, does not begin at home! A prophet has no honour in his own country and among his own people. Why is this so? Let us find out from this week's study.

¹ "UN ranks Nigerian film industry second largest," http://www.nguardiannews.com/breaking_news/article01

1. Should familiarity breed contempt?

In one movie where Muhammad Ali played himself, he told of his experience after winning the heavyweight boxing gold medal at the 1960 Rome Olympics. When he returned home to Louisville, Kentucky, he was denied a drink at a bar because of his skin colour. In frustration, he threw the Olympic medal into a river. Ali had been hailed abroad but nailed at home. Does that sound familiar?

We all in one way or another experience underrating by those most familiar with us. For example, you may be the president of the most powerful nation in the world but to your wife, you are just a husband, and to your children, just a father. They will not relate to you on how well you manage the affairs of state but how well you treat them as family. To those of us who are parents, we continue to see our children as children, even when they have themselves become parents! No matter what you have become outside of your home town, those you left behind may continue to see you as you were when you were nobody. What is responsible for this? Is it that they do not know enough about you or that they do not care?

You will recall that after the new king of Israel, David, was finally able to bring the ark of God to the City of David, he “danced before the Lord with all his might wearing a linen ephod.” The people loved it and danced along with their popular king. But his wife, Michal, “looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the Lord and she *despised him in her heart.*” Later, in the quiet of their home, she scolded her husband, saying, “How glorious was the king of Israel today *uncovering himself today in the eyes of the maids of his servants, as one of the base fellows shamelessly uncovers himself!*” [2 Sam. 6: 13-20]. All she saw was her husband flirtingly exposing his body to other ladies!

A popular cliché says that familiarity breeds contempt, which the *Encarta Dictionary* defines as “a powerful feeling of dislike toward somebody or something considered to be *worthless, inferior, or undeserving of respect.*” In this week’s text, the people of the hometown of Jesus treated Him with contempt. Was Jesus worthless, inferior or undeserving of respect? I doubt. Therefore, there is much more to it than meets the eye. Let us use today’s Bible text to probe into the matter.

2. Jesus is disrespected in His own country

Jesus was conceived in the city of Nazareth in Galilee and born in the city of Bethlehem in Judea [Lk 2: 4]. To escape Herod’s massacre of infants under two years of age, His earthly parents, Joseph and Mary, took Him to safety in Egypt. After Herod’s death, they brought Him back to Israel and dwelt in Nazareth. That is why Jesus is called the Nazarene [Matt. 3: 7-23], and most of His disciples came from Galilee, His own country.

We know very little of Christ's childhood and adolescent years. However, we do know that His parents took Him to Jerusalem, to the Feast of the Passover, when He was twelve years old. There, in the temple, He sat in the midst of the teachers "both listening to them and asking them questions." We are told that those who "heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers." When His earthly parents asked why He had left them anxious by not returning home with them earlier, He proclaimed that He was about His "Father's business." He returned home with them to Nazareth and "was subject to them...He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and men" [Lk 2: 41-52]. It was apparently during that period that He learnt carpentry, His foster-father, Joseph's trade [Matt. 13: 55].

Jesus began His earthly ministry at about the age of 30 [Lk 3: 23], following His water baptism by John the Baptist in River Jordan. After fasting for forty days and nights, during which time the devil tempted Him, He began to preach the kingdom of God with power and authority. As He went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of disease and sickness, "His fame went through all Syria" and "great multitudes followed Him" [Matt. 4: 23-25]. Since Nazareth was a city in Galilee, there was no chance that the people of His home town had not heard of His fame. So, why then did they despise Him when He visited home?

3. Factors that promote contempt

From the Bible text, we can note the following:

a) *Maybe it was His family background*

The people said, "Is this not the *carpenter's son*? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas? So they were offended at Him" [Matt. 13: 55, 56a].

They knew the Lord's family quite well. He was not from a rich family. After all, when they presented Him in the temple as a child, they could only afford two pigeons and a pair of turtle doves [Lk 2: 24], the offerings prescribed under the Law of Moses for those who could not afford a lamb [Lev. 12: 8]. His earthly parents were not among the elite of that city nor did they give their Son respectable schooling for (during an encounter with their rulers) "the Jews marvelled, saying, 'How does this Man know letters, *having never studied*?' " [Jn 7: 15]. But does it mean that a man should be judged by the standards of his family? Is there no room for self-improvement?

We all have the problem of refusing to upgrade our perception of others and remain fixated on what they were when they were with us, even when they are now bigger and holding higher positions in society than we do.

That little child that used to have a running nose is now the CEO of a major bank! That girl you used to tease in high school is now a judge of the appeal court. Therefore, you had better get used to it. Jesus had grown beyond the carpenter's son. His heavenly Father had openly declared His new status to His listeners at His baptism by the Jordan River when He said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased!" [Matt. 3: 17]. So, His family background could not have been the reason for the contempt.

b) *It could be due to profound contempt for knowledge*

As Jesus taught in the synagogue in His hometown, the people were astonished and said, "Where did this Man get *this wisdom and these mighty works?*" [Matt. 13: 54]. Is it possible that they did not know the source of His honour or did not care?

Some people are not interested in the truth except it supports their prejudices. Therefore, even when it is self-evident that those familiar people we are trying to underrate have achieved enough to be accorded recognition or respect, we hold on to our earlier (and contemptuous) view of them. That way, we can hold on to our "superior" status over them. We can expect them to defer to us instead of the other way round. But did that apply to Jesus? Let us consider two examples.

When Nicodemus, a Pharisee and ruler in Israel desired to know more about Jesus, he came by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, *we know* that You are a teacher come from God for *no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him.*" After explaining to him the concept of being born again, which Nicodemus, the man of great learning, could not comprehend, Jesus added, "No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven" [Jn 3: 1- 13]. Armed with superior knowledge, Nicodemus never again joined his fellow Pharisees to deride Jesus. For example, some officers to the chief priest and Pharisees that had been sent to arrest Jesus came back and declared, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" The Pharisees questioned whether those officers had also been deceived and added, "Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him?" Nicodemus objected and said, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?" [Jn 7:45-51].

Nathanael was originally skeptical when Philip told him that he had met "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" of whom "Moses in the law, and also the prophets wrote." Philip's knowledge of Jesus had moved from the familiar (Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph) to the Messianic (written about in the law of Moses and the prophets). Even so, Nathanael remained skeptical, saying, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" But after

his encounter with Jesus, Nathanael proclaimed, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” [**Jn 1: 46-49**].

Clearly, His people’s refusal to know more of Him was a deliberate choice of ignorance. To accept Jesus as the Messiah would put Him above the rulers, scribes and Pharisees. Today, the greatest obstacle for Moslems to become Christians is accepting Jesus as the Son of God. Some of them know He is but they cannot openly admit that truth for fear of being killed as apostates. The gay community is scared of Jesus because you cannot accept Him and remain gay!

c) *Contempt limits the power of honour*

When Jesus saw the contempt with which He was received, He said, “A prophet is not without honour except in his own country and in his own house.” Consequently, “He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief” [**Matt. 13: 57-58**]. If His people did not have faith in the healer, how could they have faith that He could heal them? So, He did not waste His spiritual power among His own people. How sad it can be when we lose the benefits that we could have received if only we honoured those who deserved it. For example, David’s wife, Michal, “had no children to the day of her death” on account of the contempt she showed to her husband when he danced in the public while bringing the ark of the Lord to Jerusalem [**2 Sam. 6: 23**].

From the forgoing, we can conclude that Jesus was not a worthless man. He was not inferior to the people of His home town. He in deed deserved to be received as a worthy Son that had brought fame to His home town. Therefore, their contempt for Him came from the depth of hell. It was anchored on envy, which is a bone cancer [**Prov. 14: 30**]! They did not hurt Jesus but themselves. Those who reject Jesus are courting their own damnation [**Jn 3: 18**].

It is more in our own interest to honour those who deserve it instead of treating them with contempt. It shows in the way we relate to our spouses or children, subordinates or servants as well as all those that we are familiar with. Two people who are most familiar with each other are a husband and wife. Rather than let that familiarity breed contempt, you should use the challenge to honour each other. You can then see why God has instructed husbands to honour their wives [**1 Pet. 3: 7**] while the wives are enjoined to submit to their husbands [**Eph. 5: 22**].

It shows in the way we treat God in His holy house, when we honour our priests and pastors more than God, when we make our worship more user-friendly than God-fearing. God Himself has said, “Those who honour Me I will honour, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” [**1 Sam. 2: 30**].

4. Conclusion: Jesus is now honoured in the whole universe!

The stone which the builders rejected has become the headstone of the corner. Jesus that was not honoured in His home town among His own people is now the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty” [Rev. 1: 8]. He says, “Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” [Rev. 22: 12]. He is now honoured in the whole universe because His Father has given Him all authority in heaven and on earth [Matt. 28: 18].

A majority of His people, the Jews, are still waiting for their Messiah because they have not accepted Jesus as the One. Many professing Christians have not really given their lives to Christ because they still love and live in sin. One of these days, without expectation, the sky will split open and Jesus will reappear. The Jews will see their Messiah and all unrepentant sinners will meet with their Judge. It will be too late then to want to honour Him because it is judgment time!

Receive Jesus in your heart, today, *right now*. Honour may not begin at home but let it be your guest.