

## THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL DISAPPOINTMENT (Mark 6:1-6a)

7.11.21

### INTRODUCTION

There is an old saying, probably familiar to most of us, that actually dates all the way back to 2 BC (actually within a couple years of the birth of Christ), based on its being found in some old Syrian manuscripts. The saying? “Familiarity breeds contempt.” The meaning? If you come to know a person or a situation really well, there is a risk of losing respect for that person or becoming careless in that particular situation. And this is the unfortunate backdrop in the story we are going to share today. But before we share the story, **let’s share some time in prayer first.**

### TEXT (Mark 6:1-6a)

***Jesus left there and went to His hometown, accompanied by His disciples — Mark 6:1.***

Now, in Mark’s gospel account, this is his next story following the raising from the dead of Jairus’ 12-year-old daughter. In the course of His ministry, Christ had visited Nazareth approximately one year before and, if you remember, it had not gone so well. According to Luke: ***All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard [His words]. They got up, drove Him out of the town, and took Him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw Him off the cliff. But He walked right through the crowd and went on His way — Luke 4:28-30.*** Not exactly handing Him the keys to the city! But regardless of that reception, Jesus came to visit His hometown again. While we obviously talk so much about His works and His words, we often overlook the tremendous, amazing grace that underscored everything He did. In this particular case, His hometown is receiving a completely undeserved favor. So . . .

***When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given Him? What are these remarkable miracles He is performing? — Mark 6:2.***

Now whatever reputation Christ had when He had visited the first time had only increased by the time this second visit occurred. The things He had said, the things He had done, had only underscored His incredible, “off-the-charts” presence. And even here, that audience in the synagogue was, according to the Greek, astonished with what they were hearing. In fact, the root of the Greek word for this reaction — *ekplesso* — means “to strike or blast.” Today we would probably say something like, “Wow, His teachings really blew me away!” And we know from the Scriptures how Jesus taught:

- 1) With authority: ***When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law — the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 7:28-29.*** In fact, Christ spoke with such authority and command that, one time, even Temple guards sent by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Him while He taught in the Temple came back empty-handed. Why? ***“No one ever spoke the way this man does” — Temple guards, John 7:46.***
- 2) With divine knowledge: ***The Jews there were amazed and asked, “How did this man get such learning without having been taught?” Jesus answered, “My teaching is not My own. It comes from the one who sent Me” — John 7:15-16.*** And who was the

One who sent Him? God. Christ's teaching couldn't come from a higher source than that.

- 3) With understanding: *[W]e do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are — yet He did not sin — Hebrews 4:15.* Very simply, Jesus understands each of us because He became one of us. Whatever we're going through, He gets it — because He gets us.
- 4) With compassion: *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things. . . . He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God — Mark 6:34; Luke 9:11b.* The prophet Isaiah predicted the compassion with which Jesus would live and minister: *He tends His flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart; He gently leads those that have young — Isaiah 40:11.*

Now Jesus had been confronted with questions countless times before, but the questions coming from this Nazarene audience were more from the standpoint of, "He's just Jesus. We've known Him since He was just a kid. So how can somebody like that even be capable of such wisdom and such accomplishments? And miracles — really?" Their familiarity appeared to be breeding some contempt. They were wondering where He got all these things they were hearing Him say, where His words came from. And such wisdom; who do you suppose He got that from? And the power to do such miraculous things like healings and such? How in the world is He doing all that? And, possibly as a reaction against who He might actually be, they begin trying to qualify the evidence that proclaims His identity.

*Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him — Mark 6:3.*

A number of things here:

- 1) Now a carpenter — which likely actually meant working in all kinds of materials, including wood and stone — was a respected occupation, but normally carpenters were not expected to be capable of miracles and everything else that had been attributed to Jesus.
- 2) Calling Him "Mary's son," while of course true, could be suggesting Mary to be the only parent still alive, meaning Joseph was dead by this time. But it could also be a kind of a veiled insult. Sons in this culture at this time were normally identified by being called the son of the father, not the mother, hinting at the possibility that Jesus was an illegitimate son — not the biological son of Joseph, but only of Mary, but obviously suggesting a conception that had absolutely nothing to do with anything miraculous.
- 3) Bringing His siblings into the conversation was merely a way of saying, "We know the family — His brothers and sisters. None of them can do any of this stuff. What's so special about Him? Why is He the only one showing off these powers? And what's more, they don't even believe in Him" — actually quite a true statement that would not change, at least regarding the brothers, until after the resurrection. But His family's lack of faith was no excuse for their own.

And then it says that they — those listening to Him in the synagogue — took “offense” at Him. The Greek word used here is the same word from which we get our word “scandalize,” which means: “*To shock or horrify (someone) by a real or imagined violation of propriety or morality.*” In other words, to put it in simple terms, the people of Nazareth simply couldn’t handle what Jesus was teaching them; they couldn’t handle the truth — so much so that it caused them to “stumble over” understanding who this returning hometown boy actually was. Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest explains it this way: “*They could not explain Him, so they rejected Him.*” He was so far outside their comfort zone of how things always had been and therefore should be that they couldn’t abide Him. Instead of Him fitting into their world, they needed to repent of their sins and seek how to fit into His world — a seeking with which Jesus would have been absolutely thrilled to teach them and come alongside them. But they would have none of that.

And then Christ responds, saying: “***A prophet is not without honor except in His own town, among His relatives and in His own home***” — ***Jesus Christ, Mark 6:4.***

The Greek uses the word for “country” to help explain Christ’s response, telling us that a prophet always has a tougher time being recognized for who he is and what he does by the place he comes from, and from the people who should know him best — his fellow countrymen, his extended family, and those from his own household.

And this brings us back to where we started — that 2,000-year-old saying, “Familiarity breeds contempt.” Phillips Brooks was a 19<sup>th</sup>-century Episcopal priest who, during his 33-year ministry career, pastored parishes in both Philadelphia and Boston. Actually we all should know of him because of the well-known Christmas song we sing every year of which he actually wrote the lyrics: “O Little Town Of Bethlehem.” But he also had a comment regarding that old saying concerning familiarity: “*Familiarity breeds contempt, only with contemptible things or among contemptible people.*” So, the contempt that Jesus was experiencing in His hometown didn’t say a thing about Him, but it said a whole lot about them.

***He could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them*** — ***Mark 6:5.***

One response to their contempt was the few instances where Jesus actually did show Himself through the power of His works. This was a matter of nothing else but Christ’s decision to not show much based on their complete refusal to believe in who He was despite all the evidence and testimony to the contrary. And, to put it as simply as possible, God will not violate unbelief. In this moment, Christ allowed the people of Nazareth to speak from their hearts completely unimpeded.

***He was amazed at their lack of faith*** — ***Mark 6:6a.***

There are only two times in the gospels that Christ is said to be amazed at something, and they’re kind of on opposite sides of the spectrum:

- 1) Jesus marvels at the faith of a Roman centurion in asking for healing for a loved servant; Matthew famously notes: ***[Jesus] was amazed and said to those following Him, “Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith”*** — ***Matthew 8:10.*** In this instance, Christ was in a state of positive admiration, marveling

at that man — a Gentile — and his simple faith in the power of Christ’s words alone to heal.

- 2) And here, Jesus is literally “wowed,” using the same Greek word to express “marvel,” but in a very negative sense of how stone-cold their hearts are to Him. In this case, Christ is marveling at Jews, His own people, who refuse to recognize Him, reminding us of John’s words of introduction to the gospel story: ***He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognize Him. He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him — John 1:10-11.***

It must have been with a great sense of sadness that He departed from Nazareth that day — not only because He would never return, but because of the spiritual state in which He found His hometown people.

## **APPLICATION**

Now before we go any further, we should probably take a moment to make a distinction between two often confused words: doubt and unbelief.

Doubt is not the absence of faith but rather having questions about your faith. We did a whole series earlier in my time here in Redwood called “The Big Questions.” Some of those questions were curiosity pieces, but others were honest questions presented from a place of doubt. No one doubted the faith of the person asking the question. The fact is, we all find ourselves with questions at various times — especially when it comes to things like, “What in the world is God doing?” or “Why hasn’t God answered my prayers?” Questions like this are a normal part of our lives as we continue to grow, as Peter said, ***in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ — II Peter 3:18a.*** Doubt is not a rejection of faith.

Remember at the ascension of Jesus as He returned to heaven? Matthew tells us: ***Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted — Matthew 28:16-17.*** They weren’t in a place of unbelief; they were in a place of doubt, of trying to figure out how all of these pieces — the crucifixion, the resurrection, now the ascension — were supposed to go together. Nobody bailed; they just had questions.

Now unbelief, on the other hand, is the determined refusal to believe. It blocks out evidence; it turns its intellectual nose up at logic. This is the person who says, “I am going to believe what I believe, and I don’t care what you tell me or show me. I ain’t budging.” Apologist Josh McDowell told of the time where he was lecturing at a university and, following the lecture, he was meeting with various people from the audience. One professor in particular engaged him. Finally, after answering all kinds of questions and offering this guy all kinds of Biblical proofs, Josh McDowell simply asked, “Professor, if I could show you beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus Christ is exactly who the Bible says He is, would you believe?” And without hesitation, the professor answered, “No.” What this tells us is that unbelief is not a matter of the intellect, but a matter of the will. In this visit to Nazareth, Jesus did not do many miracles because they deliberately chose, as a matter of will, not to believe in Him.

So how does unbelief works its opposition to Christ?

- 1) Unbelief chooses to ignore evidence. Christ returned home with an abundance of proofs and witnesses and testimonials that He was far more than just some ordinary

neighborhood kid who had made good. He was God's promised "anointed one" — the centuries-long anticipated Messiah. They had word aplenty that this one who read and spoke in their synagogue was also doing miracles of healing, showing power and authority over disease, over nature, over demons. What's more, they had actually seen and experienced a moment of His awesome power the last time Jesus was in town: While they angrily wanted to throw Him off a cliff, He quietly walked right through that mob and their anger and simply went on His way. But Nazareth did not want to conclude what the evidence was adding up to, that the Messiah was in their midst.

- 2) Unbelief chooses to focus on irrelevant details. Because unbelief is built not on a foundation of verifiable facts or figures but rather on the flimsy foundation of will, in looking to strengthen that foundation, they will bring in details that don't even matter, that have not one little bit to do with what's being considered. We see that in their response to Jesus: Isn't He just a carpenter — like His occupation should make any difference? Isn't He Mary's son — like who His mother is should make any difference? Don't we know His brothers and sisters — suggesting that, since we don't see this kind of power in them, why does it show up in you? An unbeliever will use anything he can think of to block the truth — even if it's irrelevant.
- 3) Unbelief chooses to react strongly to anybody who disagrees with them. Because they are working so hard to block the truth, they will become very easily offended when somebody continues to provide the opposition of facts. Truth exposes lies. Unbelief would rather continue in their lies, so the truth is incredibly threatening. Jesus made note of this in talking with Nicodemus: ***"This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed"*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 3:19-20***. Unbelief would rather continue in their lies than confess: "I was wrong." And unbelief prevents somebody from being changed by the truth.
- 4) Unbelief impacts what God can do. Now this is not to say that unbelief is more powerful than God. That would mean that God is not all-powerful. What it is saying, particularly in this case of Jesus in Nazareth, is that the whole reason Jesus did miracles was to provide further affirmation of who He was. If He is being rejected, if He is seeing that there is no way these people are ever going to see Him for who He is, then the whole reason for miracles is pretty much taken away. As Paul would say some years later: ***The god of this age (Satan) has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God*** — ***Paul, II Corinthians 4:4***.

Bottom line: Unbelievers do not want to change; they like how they live. Unbelievers do not want to admit that they have been wrong; they're sure that they are right and everybody else is sadly mistaken or badly misinformed. And, at the end of the day, unbelievers live for the "now"; they live for the call of the moment — today's adrenaline, today's toys, today's parties, today's concerns — and, in so doing, totally destroy the gift of an eternity of joy, peace and satisfaction beyond their wildest dreams — an eternal life that Christ has offered them, and completely paid for.

Now, can anybody crash that “party” of unbelief? Absolutely — God can change them, like night to day. As Ezekiel shared with us what God shared with him: ***“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put My Spirit in you and move you to follow My decrees and be careful to keep My laws” — God speaking, Ezekiel 36:26-27.*** God truly can, and does, make all things possible!

## CONCLUSION

Now, before we close, it might be appropriate to clearly state what, in the context of Jesus Christ and our faith in Him, belief is — in three simple words:

- 1) Helplessness — the most basic condition of anybody. How can we illustrate our helplessness? Well, for one thing, we can’t control anything about how we are — our brains, talents, abilities, strengths, likes. The fact is, we have been fashioned by God, by His design, to be people who are created to accomplish His plans. We, just as we are, are the result of God’s perfect plans. And for another thing, simply being born, we are sinners; the Bible makes that very obvious. And there is nothing we can do — in our own strength, in our own ideas — to change that. We are helpless because there is not one thing we can ever do within ourselves to make ourselves pleasing to God.
- 2) Surrender — the most basic response to God. In light of our helplessness, we have absolutely nothing to present to God that would impress Him. And yet our eternity depends on being able to do just that — please God. But by completely surrendering our lives to God, we are opened up by Him to receive the greatest gift anybody that has ever been presented to anybody: the gift of salvation — of being saved from our sins. Which brings us to:
- 3) Jesus — the response to our helplessness from God. Jesus lived a life perfectly pleasing to God in every way and then, at the cross, He essentially offered a trade: His perfect life for our imperfect ones. Our helplessness coupled with our surrender allows that perfect life entrance into our lives; in other words, miracle of miracles, Jesus is living within us. His perfection is now what God sees when He looks at us. And the deposit of Christ into our lives — by means of His Holy Spirit — allows a continual molding and making of each of us into a person that is continuously being transformed into a living, breathing image of Christ Himself.

That’s what belief means for a Christian. God authored a salvation of transformation, changing us from what we were — helpless in our sins — to being surrendered to the absolutely perfect power of Christ. We have been washed from our sins, and can now look forward to two amazing things: first, a life lived in the strength and continued renewing of our lives through the Holy Spirit and, second, an eternal life beyond our wildest imagination in the presence of the Father and the Son.

Do you share that belief? I know that helplessness and surrender are sometimes a very hard place to be. But in God’s eyes, those two things are absolutely necessary — so necessary in fact that there is no other option to be able to be pleasing to God.

Do you share that belief? Let’s pray!