

Hometown Rejection: Mark 6:1-13
Ben Reaoch, Three Rivers Grace Church
Sunday, June 27th, 2010

We come together this morning as the family of God gathered around the Word of God to read about our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What a privilege this is for us. What a gift it is to have this revelation from God. What hope we have in Jesus: who He is and what He has done for us. We have a rock to stand on in this world that sometimes seems to be crumbling around us. We have a foundation. We have an anchor.

We come again and again to this Book because it is God's Word to us, God's revelation of Himself to us. And it's in this Book that we can find real hope. Where else would we turn? What else could we do when the storms of life sweep over us, when life seems so uncertain, unpredictable, unstable? This is our sure hope.

I hope you find the Word of God an encouragement to your soul. I hope you don't find it boring or trivial or irrelevant. What could be more exciting and weighty and relevant to our lives than the very words of God Almighty given to us in this Book? And yet our sinful hearts grow cold. We're so prone to wander. We're distracted by other things, discouraged by trials, overwhelmed by responsibilities. That's where I found myself Thursday afternoon as I was working on this sermon and struggling to put together a message from this text. I just felt like I had dried up. So I'm saying this to myself as much as to anyone else. Let's confess to the Lord that we are so easily distracted, discouraged, overwhelmed. And let's ask Him to grant us a passion for Him and His Word. We need His Word so desperately. So when you feel that apathy creeping into your heart, fall down on your knees and plead for mercy. Ask God to change your desires. Ask Him to kill your fleshly desires and intensify your godly desires.

It has been a very emotional week for many of us, with Emily's death, and there are other trials that many of you are facing as well. What are we to do with these emotions, these trials? We need to go to God's Word. We need to be still and know that He is God. My hope for each one of us this morning is that we can calm our hearts and focus our minds on the Word of God and find encouragement for our souls. As we're studying through the Gospel of Mark we get to watch our Savior in action. We get to observe His life and ministry through this divinely inspired text.

In the passages just before this we've seen some amazing triumphs in Jesus' ministry, some miraculous displays of His authority and power. He calmed the storm. He healed the man

with the legion of demons. He healed the woman with the issue of blood. And He raised Jairus's daughter from the dead! After reading of those events one might think that Jesus is well on His way to winning the universal approval of His contemporaries. But now we're reminded of the outright rejection that He faced even though He was a celebrity and such a powerful force for good. There were still those who rejected Him.

In chapter 2 the scribes said He was blaspheming (verse 7). In chapter 3 the Pharisees held counsel with the Herodians to figure out how to destroy Him (verse 6). Later in chapter 3 the scribes said that He was possessed by Beelzebul (verse 22). And even His own family thought He was out of His mind (verse 21). This is the sad note that we return to this morning. In spite of His extreme popularity, in spite of His miraculous powers, in spite of His authoritative teaching and preaching, there are still many (even those closest to Him) who totally reject what He is doing.

And this reminds us where the story of Jesus' life is heading. It's not heading toward political power and worldly acclaim. Rather, He is heading toward the cross. He is being rejected by His own people. As it says in John 1:11, "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him." This is an indictment upon all those who reject Jesus. It is shameful and wicked and points to our depravity that individuals can be exposed to the power of Jesus in such clear ways and still reject Him.

From another vantage point we also recognize that this is part of God's gracious plan to send Jesus to the cross to die in the place of sinners. "It was the will of the Lord to crush him" (Isaiah 53:10). Jesus was "delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Therefore what we need to see in this passage is the wickedness of rejecting Jesus and also the sovereignty of God in sending Jesus to be rejected. So as we look at the unbelief of those in Nazareth (and marvel at it, as Jesus did), let's keep in mind the gracious and glorious plan that God had in all of this. Jesus' rejection means our acceptance. Jesus was despised and rejected by men (Isaiah 53:3), which resulted in His tortuous death on the cross. And it was that death that brought us peace (Isaiah 53:5). It is through that death that we are saved.

Well, let's look at this hometown rejection. Verse 1 says that Jesus went away from there, that is, from Jairus's house, and came to his hometown, which is Nazareth. In 1:9 there's a reference to Nazareth of Galilee, which is where Jesus came from when He went to be baptized by John in the Jordan. Also, in 1:24 the unclean spirit addresses Jesus and calls Him "Jesus of Nazareth." He was known as Jesus of Nazareth because He was from Nazareth. That was His hometown where He grew up.

Nazareth was a very small town, about 500 residents at the most. And it was about 25 miles southwest from Capernaum, which has been the headquarters for Jesus' Galilean ministry. Capernaum was on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, and so He and the disciples would have travelled southwest into the hill country to come to this little village which was so familiar to Jesus. And in many ways He was so familiar to them. Imagine growing up in a town of 500 people. By the time you're 30 years old, you would certainly know everybody there, and they would know you. This is what Jesus is walking into.

It's important that we understand that the disciples were with Him for this experience, because they are getting a first-hand look at the kind of thing they are going to face in the very near future. They are going to be sent out by Jesus to go from town to town, and in many places they will meet with the same kind of rejection. This is what discipleship is. Jesus was rejected, even in His hometown. And we, as His disciples, will often be rejected as well. So the twelve were there in Nazareth with Jesus to observe this rejection so that they would have a taste of what was about to happen to them.

Verse 2 tells us that it was the Sabbath when Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. And the reaction is the same as before. The people are amazed by His teaching. They are astonished. In chapter 1, when Jesus was in Capernaum, He was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath, and the same word is used. "They were *astonished* at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes" (Mark 1:22). This is the effect that Jesus' teaching had on people. Even if they didn't respond in faith to what He was teaching, they could sense that something extraordinary was happening in their midst.

What is so appalling about the event in Nazareth is that their astonishment resulted in offense. The first three questions seem to be mostly positive. They are recognizing the wisdom and the mighty works of Jesus. "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?" This is why they are astonished. They are in awe of Jesus' authority and don't know what to make of it.

But next they discuss the facts of Jesus' family. They talk about the familiarity they have with Him. And rather than their astonishment resulting in faith, it results in offense. Familiarity breeds contempt. They were so familiar with Jesus. They knew His family, His siblings, His occupation. "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him." Familiarity breeds contempt. This is the application of one of Aesop's fables, "The Fox and the Lion." The

story is this: “One day a fox who had never seen a lion was walking in the wood. Suddenly the king of beasts stood in the path before him, and the fox almost died of fright. He ran away and hid himself in his den. The next time he came upon the lion he merely paused to allow the majestic beast to pass by. The third time they met the fox boldly approached the lion and passed the time of day with him and asked after his family’s health.” What happened to the fox had happened to the people of Nazareth. They were astonished for a moment, but their familiarity with Jesus undermined that astonishment.

They thought to themselves, we’ve known this guy since He was a boy. We know His mother and brothers and sisters. He’s the carpenter in our small town. He’s the guy who builds things with His hands. He’s just a regular guy like the rest of us. How could He have this wisdom and authority and miraculous power? And therefore they despised Him. They took offense at him (end of verse 3). The Greek word there is *skandalizō*. This was scandalous to them. This word has been used earlier in Mark, in the parable of the soils. Of the rocky ground, Jesus says “they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately *they fall away*” (*skandalizō*, 4:17). The word has to do with unbelief. And for these folks in Nazareth, their familiarity with Jesus made His powers scandalous in their minds. They would not believe that the carpenter boy from down the street was truly a spiritual authority. They had grown up with Him and could not accept Him as the Son of God.

I wonder if this kind of attitude has ever been true of us. Many of us grew up going to church. We learned the Bible stories. We sang the songs. We did the crafts. We listened to the lessons. We watched Jesus and the disciples move across the felt board. And it all became so familiar. And it became familiar to the point that we took it all for granted. The amazing news of the Gospel became mundane. The most shocking and wonderful message in all the universe became boring. Have you ever seen that happen in your own heart? I think it’s something we need to be battling against all the time. Our hearts are prone to wander. Our sinful nature deadens our spiritual senses. And the familiar Gospel becomes ordinary, uninteresting. We hear it, and we say, “Oh, I’ve heard that before.” It’s not that exciting.

Brothers and sisters, this is why we need to pray for revival in our hearts. We need God to continually work in our lives to make us amazed at His grace. We need to be revived so that the familiar things of the Bible make us shout for joy rather than yawn. The more familiar the Bible becomes to us, the more it should be fuel for our worship. The danger is that familiarity will breed

contempt. By God's grace, familiarity will produce praise and worship. Let's check our hearts.

This also makes me think of the children of this congregation, because I desperately want all of the children here to be very familiar with the life and ministry of Jesus and the Gospel He proclaimed. And I want that familiarity to be a living and vibrant familiarity, not an empty and lifeless familiarity. I want the children among us to see the wisdom and the mighty works of Jesus, and bow down to worship Him. I don't want them to say later in the lives, "Oh, I grew up with that. Yeah, I know the story, but I take offense at it now." What a tragedy it is when that happens. We do know that ultimately the salvation of our children is in the Lord's hands. But as parents and as a church, let this be a reminder to us to model authentic Christianity for the coming generations. It's not just a story that we want our kids to be familiar with. It's certainly not a list of rules that we want to ingrain in their minds. It's a living relationship with the Lord that we want them to enter into. So let's live this out before them and encourage in them a faith-filled familiarity with Jesus, rather than an empty and superficial familiarity.

In verse 4 Jesus states that the rejection He's experiencing is exactly what He expected. "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." He mentions three concentric circles that are increasingly personal. His hometown, his relatives, and his own household. It seems that the closer you were to Jesus personally as He grew up in Nazareth, the more difficult it would be to embrace Him as an authoritative prophet sent from God, the more difficult it would be to accept the legitimacy of His miracles and recognize the significance of what He was preaching.

James Edwards, in his commentary on Mark, writes, "Once again [as in chapter 3 when His family was saying He was out of His mind] (3:31-35) Jesus' own family are outsiders and he is a stranger in his own home. Thus, exposure to Jesus and the gospel is no guarantee of faith; indeed, apart from faith, exposure to the gospel inoculates as often as it enlivens."¹

This shows the necessity of faith, and the necessity of God to sovereignly grant that faith. Our hearts are naturally inclined away from faith in God. And what we're seeing here is that familiarity with Jesus does not make a person more inclined to believe. In fact, many times it works in the opposite way. Familiarity often makes a person more inclined to reject Jesus.

Salvation is never automatic. And it's never a guarantee that the parent's faith will become the children's faith. It's never a guarantee that the children in the Sunday School classes are going

¹ James Edwards, *Mark*, page 174.

to be saved. It's a miracle every time a person repents and believes, whether that person grows up in the best of Christian homes, or hears the Gospel for the first time at age 85 in a remote, unreached area of the world. There's no formula we can follow that will guarantee salvation. Many times those whom we think most likely to believe, don't. And many times those whom we think least likely to believe, do.

So many things about faith and salvation seem to go directly against our human ways of thinking. And God delights to do things in His own way, rather than in our ways, because it reminds us again and again that He's in control, and He gets all the glory. Salvation is from the Lord.

Verse 5 is shocking to read, and we may think that we've misread it. Could it be saying that Jesus' power was limited in some way, and that it was being limited by something outside of Himself? Could it be that the people's unbelief was more powerful than Jesus, that He was restricted somehow because of what was going on in their hearts? The verse says, "He could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them."

I think the fact that Jesus did heal some shows that the problem here was not that He lacked power or that His power was limited somehow by the unbelief of His hometown. Rather, He *could* not because He *would* not. After all, why *would* He multiply miracles in that place when He knew that it would only intensify their rejection of Him? It's similar to what happened in the previous passage when Jesus was going to raise Jairus's daughter from the dead. There were those around who did not believe in Jesus' power, and they laughed at Him. And so "he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was" (5:40). This is what Jesus was doing in Nazareth as well. He was putting them outside because of their unbelief. He would not allow them to witness many great miracles because of their hardness of heart.

The final statement that we'll look at this morning is in verse 6 where Mark tells us that Jesus marveled because of their unbelief. This is such an interesting statement. We might wonder why Jesus would marvel at their unbelief. Didn't He expect their unbelief? Isn't that why He said, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household"? He assumed that. He knew it was going to happen. So how could He marvel at it? Throughout the Gospels the people marvel at Jesus. They marvel at His teaching. They marvel at His miracles. But in only two events does it say that Jesus marveled. When Jesus healed the centurion's servant, Jesus marveled at the centurion's faith, and He said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I

found such faith” (Luke 7:9; Matthew 8:10). And then here Jesus marveled at their lack of faith. Jesus marveled at belief and unbelief. He was amazed by remarkable faith, and He was amazed by remarkable hard-heartedness.

I think there’s a lesson here for us, that we should never let our theological affirmations take away the utter astonishment of what can happen in the human heart. Jesus knows theology. He’s God, after all! And He’s also omniscient. He is all-knowing. So it wasn’t a surprise to Him that His hometown rejected Him. It wasn’t something He was unprepared for. But still He marveled at their unbelief. I wonder if sometimes our understanding of total depravity keeps us from marveling at unbelief. I wholeheartedly affirm the doctrine of total depravity. I think this text is exhibit A. But still, Jesus marveled. And so should we. When a co-worker or neighbor or friend or family member rejects the Gospel, we can think through that theologically and understand that they are totally depraved, unable and unwilling to turn to Jesus until God does the sovereign work of regeneration in their hearts. But at the same time we should also step back in astonishment that anyone would reject such Good News! We should marvel at the fact that anyone could hear a clear presentation of what Jesus accomplished for sinners, and then reject Jesus.

Let’s keep both the head and the heart engaged in our evangelism. We understand theologically what’s going on when a person rejects Jesus and when a person accepts Jesus. And our hearts should also be greatly affected by these things. We should rejoice and celebrate and be amazed when a person repents of sin and bows the knee to Jesus. And our hearts should break and we should be astounded when sinners on the road to destruction reject the only hope they could have of salvation.

We’ve seen again this morning a snapshot of Jesus’ life. This is our Savior, already on His way to the cross, rejected and despised by men. I hope that we will all want to be more and more familiar with our precious Savior. And may God cause our increasing familiarity to translate into increasing passion and love for Him.