

Unbelief in Nazareth -- Mark 6:1-6

by Travis Dean
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Please bow your heads with me for prayer:

"Lord, this is all about You. Everything that has taken place here today has all been for Your glory. And now as we open Your Word, we recognize that this book is all about You. We ask for the Holy Spirit to reveal to us Your glory. May we all see Jesus in such a powerful way that we will become like Him. I pray this in Jesus' name, amen.

As some of you may remember, I grew up working in my parent's bakery. We used a couple mixers similar to this one on the screen. I remember my brother and I often being at odds with the gentleman who operated the mixers. His name was Steve. He was a big fan of Fords. My brother and I were Chevy fans. Steve was a big fan of the Washington Redskins football team. On the other hand, my brother and I despised them. It all seems rather trivial now, and I'm not sure why we had the strong views that we did. But I do remember causing Steve some grief at the bakery over these things. I shot rubber bands at him in my spare time, some of which made it into the mixing bowl. The time came when I went away to academy and college, and I didn't see Steve for quite some time. But I remember returning to my home church while I was in college. And there was Steve. We didn't say much to each other, and certainly didn't rehearse our former rivalries. But going back to your hometown is often a bitter-sweet experience. Such was the case for Jesus. Today, as we continue our journey through the book of Mark, Jesus returns to His hometown.

I invite you to read with me a summary of today's story:

Jesus returned to His hometown. On the Sabbath He was asked to teach in the synagogue. Everyone was amazed by His teaching and questioned how He got this great wisdom and power. Knowing His family, however, they refused to admit that He was more than human. Jesus was amazed by their unbelief and was unable to perform any miracles there.

As we begin let's consider what Jesus experienced in this story. First of all, He experienced going to His hometown. Mark 6:1 says Jesus "went out from there". Many scholars believe this describes the time when Jesus left Capernaum and began His third missionary tour of Galilee. And the first place Mark records that Jesus went to was His hometown, which was Nazareth. This was about 20 miles from Capernaum. This is actually the second time that Jesus returned to Nazareth since the beginning of His ministry. Only Luke records Jesus' first visit back to Nazareth. This occasion is recorded in Luke 4:16-30. We won't take the time to turn to this passage, but this first visit to Nazareth did not go well. The people were so upset with Jesus' claim to be the Messiah that they tried to throw Him off a cliff. But there was an attraction in Nazareth for Jesus. His family still lived there. Certainly He looked forward to spending some time with His mother. His father, Joseph, had probably passed away by this time, and therefore is not mentioned in the story.

Second, Jesus experienced a confused audience. In spite of how things had gone the last time Jesus had taught in the Nazarene synagogue, He was asked to teach upon His second return to His hometown. As Jesus taught, the people were amazed. He spoke with wisdom and authority. Their hearts were deeply moved. And yet they were all too aware of His upbringing. He had grown up in a poor home. His father had been a carpenter, which was a low-paying career at that time. Jesus Himself had taken up this same trade. In the minds of His fellow Nazarenes, He was just another Jew – very common and ordinary. The first question they ask themselves, after hearing Jesus' powerful teaching was "Where did this man get these things?" How did

He become so full of wisdom and power? They can't think of a suitable answer to this question. And so they are left confused. So, as the Teacher, Jesus looked out over the people gathered in that synagogue. He recognized the confusion. Once again, they refused to believe that He was more than a common Nazarene.

Third, Jesus experienced identifying with the prophets. In Mark 6:4 He repeats a common proverb. He relates His own experience to that of the prophets in the Old Testament. Why would Jesus link Himself with the prophets? I invite you to turn with me to John chapter 6. Jesus has just fed five thousand men, besides women and children. All He had to start with were five barley loaves and two small fish. Not only was everyone filled, but there were twelve baskets of bread left over. Notice the people's response in John 6:14. (Read) The Jews had been expecting a prophet to come. Perhaps they had in mind the promise in Deuteronomy 18:15, where God said He would raise up a prophet like Moses. This anticipated prophet seems to be equated with the promised Messiah. So, when Jesus miraculously provided all this food, they connected His power with that of the promised prophet. And Jesus connects Himself to the prophets by the use of this proverb in Mark 6:4. Just as the prophets in the Old Testament gave the people messages from God, so Jesus had come to speak on behalf of God His Father.

Last of all, Jesus experienced a great absence of faith. Mark says "He marveled because of their unbelief." Through that whole town, He could not find any faith. As a result, Mark 6:5 says, "He could do no mighty work there." All the miracles that He performed throughout the rest of Galilee He was unable to do in Nazareth. Coming to Nazareth was like a shadow or a solar eclipse. There didn't seem to be any spiritual life there. Surely this must have been difficult for Jesus to witness.

So, this is what Jesus experienced in our story today. But He is more than an actor in a play. He is our Example. His actions reveal the life of a healthy and dangerous Christian. This story reveals Jesus as our Example in that He gave Nazareth a second chance. Jesus began His ministry in Judea. Only John's gospel account records this part of His ministry. After Jesus was rejected by the Jewish leaders in Judea, He began His ministry in Galilee. Can you think of where He would have started His Galilean ministry? In Nazareth. Jesus' first visit to Nazareth, recorded in Luke 4:16-30, is the first incident in Jesus' ministry in Galilee. In spite of the hostile response He received at this visit, He still went back a second time.

And so He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is slow to write people off. There is a company, the Barna Group, which researches our modern culture and how it relates to Christianity. They have confirmed that our culture today has become very resistant to the message of Jesus Christ. A song entitled, "Fifteen", has been written by Greg Long in congruence with the discoveries of the Barna Group's research. This song speculates that in our modern culture it takes fifteen times of hearing about Jesus for someone to believe. Most of my exposure to evangelism in the Adventist church doesn't allow someone to have fifteen chances. As a student literature evangelist, selling Christian books, I was given the idea that when I spoke to someone, it could be their first and last chance to be saved. When I have been involved with or acquainted with various evangelistic meetings, I have seen the same mentality. We work to get the people to come. If they don't respond by being baptized, we often forget about them and move on, at least until our next seminar. But Jesus' example in our story shows a different picture. In fact, even after repeated rejections and crucifixion by the Jews in Jerusalem, Jesus still sent the apostles out after His resurrection first to where? Jerusalem! And even when they rejected the apostles, God still in His mercy preserved Jerusalem for another 36 years, before being destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD. God's patience did eventually end. But He was slow, very slow to write off the Jews. And when people don't respond to our evangelistic efforts or our witnessing, the response of a healthy and dangerous Christian is to be slow in writing them off. So, whether I'm the first person to share Jesus with someone, or I'm number fifteen, I need to be patient with people who

don't respond favorably to my testimony or other witnessing efforts. If I am aware of my slowness in responding to God's work in my heart, I will understand how others can be slow, too.

The second way this story reveals Jesus as our example is in that He was both ordinary and extraordinary. The people in Nazareth couldn't deny Jesus' supernatural abilities. And yet they also knew Him to be very ordinary. They knew His family well and how poor they were. Jesus wasn't ashamed of His background or upbringing. He was comfortable with His humanity and humility. In fact, His favorite name for Himself was the Son of Man, which revealed His identity as a man. And so Jesus shows that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who is comfortable with their dual identity. A lot of my life I was not comfortable with my humanity. I avoided places that made me uncomfortable. I gave the impression that I had it all together. I don't think anyone really knew who I was on the inside. There is a quote from an article in the magazine, "Signs of the Times". It was written by Ellen White back in 1915. Notice what she wrote: "Nothing can be more helpless and yet more invincible than the soul that feels its nothingness, and relies wholly upon the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour." Because I am ordinary, I often feel helpless. The forces of evil are so strong in comparison with my human strength. And yet if I rely on Jesus, I am also invincible. That is extraordinary! It's ok to be ordinary. It's ok to be just an ordinary person. It's ok to feel helpless. It's ok to admit you're wrong. It's ok to say, "I don't know. I don't have all the answers." You don't have to be afraid to say, "I'm sorry." It's ok to be just plain old human with faults and weaknesses. In Jesus Christ I am invincible. I am a dangerous Christian! I am filled with the fullness of God. I am both ordinary and extraordinary.

In conclusion, I would like us to try and understand those people in Nazareth. They experienced confusion. They couldn't reconcile the fact that Jesus was both ordinary and extraordinary. They were all too familiar with His humility and poverty. Even during His ministry, He remained financially poor. On the other hand, they couldn't deny the power in Jesus' words. They couldn't ignore the power that flowed through His hands and set people free from demons, sickness, and even death. This strange dichotomy awakened a response in their hearts. Mark says, "They were offended at Him." This word translated, "offended", gives the picture of getting caught in a trap or stumbling over a stone. To these people in Nazareth Jesus was like a stone that you trip over. He annoyed them. He made them uncomfortable. To them have Him in town was like stumbling over something. As a result they chose not to believe in Him. Instead they disapproved of Him.

What about me? When I feel annoyed because of what God allows to happen in my life. When He doesn't do what I want Him to, it can feel like He's a rock that's getting in the way. But when I don't understand God, do I label Him as a "Rock of offense" or do I choose Him to be my "Rock of ages". Is He an offensive God to me or is He someone I can go to, hide behind, and be safe? God's ways are not our ways. It is inevitable that He will offend us at one time or another. The question is, "Will I be offended like the people in Nazareth, or will I continue to believe in Him?" Those of you who would like to cling to Him as your Rock of ages, please stand and sing with me our closing hymn, "Rock of Ages".