

A Not So Welcome Home Mark 6

We are continuing our look at Mark's gospel this morning. Turn with me to **Mark 6:1-6**. I want to read this brief passage and then share some observations with you.

(Read the passage.)

You will recall that Jesus was living now in Capernaum but had been preaching around the Sea of Galilee. In the past few weeks we have talked about him healing a paralyzed man, healing a man with a withered hand, calming the sea and the wind during a storm and delivering a demon possessed man and raising a little girl from the dead.. Now he has come to the western side of the Galilee and has gone to his hometown of Nazareth.

Nazareth was not a big town. Some have estimated that the village proper only had a few hundred people living there at that time. It had a poor reputation and is still a different kind of city. Remember the question asked by Nathaniel, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Jesus had returned to Nazareth after his temptation in the wilderness according to Luke 4:16. It was there he read from the prophet Isaiah about the Spirit of the Lord being upon him and it was there, in response to his reading and his announcement that today that prophecy was being fulfilled through him, that the hometown folks tried to throw him off of a cliff.

Now it appears he has returned after ministering in Capernaum and other places in the region. Once again, his miracle working and his teaching results in astonishment and amazement from his listeners. Notice the questions these home-town folks begin to ask. "Where does Jesus get off talking and teaching like this? He didn't go to rabbinical school so where did he get this wisdom and insight to the Scripture. Isn't this the carpenter?" The word translated as carpenter could also apply to someone who could work with metal or stone as well as with wood. He could be a mason in addition to being able to do carpentry. It was likely that he could build most anything, from yokes and farming instruments to chairs and tables to beams and doors for houses and other structures.

Early in Jesus childhood years the capital of the Galilee region, a city called Sepphoris, had been destroyed by the Romans. Rebuilding had begun and carpenters and builders were in demand. Nazareth was only a few miles from the city of Sepphoris

so it was likely that Joseph had worked there along with many of the men of the village. As Jesus grew, Joseph would have taught him the trade so to the folks in Nazareth, Jesus was a carpenter and nothing more.

Notice they asked, **“Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?”** Typically a man is identified as the son of his father. Some have suggested they said this in order to cast a shadow on his birth, not believing the story of the virgin birth and suggesting that Joseph wasn’t his father and that he was illegitimate. Some suggest they called him Mary’s son to distinguish from the other children who were Joseph’s by his marriage to a first wife. Most scholars believe that Joseph had died by this time and they simply referred to him as the son of Mary, his mother.

The point is everyone in town knew him, or felt they knew him. They knew his brothers and sisters, (the Scripture seems to imply that these were actually siblings, i.e. other children of Mary rather than Joseph’s children by an earlier marriage, casting doubt on the belief by some parts of the church in Mary’s perpetual virginity). Because they knew him, they couldn’t see how he could be anyone special. Surely he couldn’t be the Messiah or a prophet. He is just our local carpenter.

Jesus says it is only among his own family and hometown that a prophet fails to be honored. He is shocked and amazed at the stubbornness of their hearts and at their refusal to recognize the works that he was doing and to believe upon him. That unbelief by the hometown crowd has an unfortunate consequence for Nazareth. Verse 5 tells us he could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. I have often said that although God responds to faith when it comes to healing, it is not the only factor. Nor is unbelief the only factor in our not being healed. I don’t think unbelief is to Jesus what Kryptonite is to Superman. Unbelief doesn’t render Jesus powerless and unable to heal, as if he really wanted to but doubt and unbelief has weakened his power to the extent he can’t heal even if he chose to. **The unbelief of the people in Nazareth did not limit his power but rather it limited his mission.** You see Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, to heal the sick and to free the bound and captive. But their unbelief, their refusal to open their heart and receive Jesus by faith, meant he could not carry out the full extent of his mission and his plans

in their town and in their lives. They limited his ministry and the expression of his miraculous power in their lives and in their city by refusing to believe upon him.

Jesus then left Nazareth and began again teaching all around the Galilee, going from village to village to share the good news that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand.

That's the story. I want to go back and look at the heart of the questions that were being asked about Jesus. In fact, so far in Mark's gospel three important questions have now been asked about him. In response to his ministry in the first chapter the people were amazed and asked this question: **"What is this?"** They said it was "A new teaching – and with authority!" Mark 1:27 In response to his forgiving sins in Mark 2:7 and calming the storm in Mark 4:41 they asked, **"Who is this?"** Now in Mark 6:2 they are asking **"From where is this?" (What is the source of his power?)** (Referring to his teaching and his miraculous power to heal and work miracles.) In other words, what is the source of his power?

Three questions, the answers to which have important consequences. What is this, who is this and from where is this power? It's what everyone wanted to know and what folks still want to know. Let's talk about these three questions for a moment.

What is this? When they heard Jesus teaching they wanted to know. Is this a new religion or is this a new life? Is this a new way of looking at and understanding the Law of Moses, a new and deeper way of following the rules and regulations of the law or is this about something deeper? Look and listen to what Jesus taught. He came announcing good news when there has been little good news in their lives. He calls them to repent and to believe that the kingdom of heaven has come among them. By that he is talking about the will and the rule and reign of God being present in their lives. God is available to them. This was not about some future event far away, this was about a relationship now. God is concerned about them and their needs, their lives. God has come among them to give them eternal life. This is something new and extraordinary.

What is this? This is about a relationship and not just rules and regulations, laws and rituals. This is about a God whom Jesus teaches is our Heavenly Father. He illustrates his love for us with the story of a prodigal son that experiences the love and forgiveness and grace of an extraordinary father. He tells us we can come home to our

Heavenly Father and find forgiveness and mercy. Jesus extends an invitation to us to come to him and find rest for our souls. We can find abundant life. If we will believe upon him, he will give to us eternal life.

What is this? This is the gospel, the good news, the only hope, the way of salvation for all who will come in faith and believe. This is the answer to the deepest cry of the human heart. This is the way that leads to life eternal if we will only look and believe. But the folks in Nazareth refused to see what this was really all about.

The second question they were asking was **Who is this?** “Isn’t this just Mary’s son? Aren’t these his brothers?” They made up their mind without looking at the evidence. They said he was Mary’s boy and James and Joseph and Judas and Simon’s brother and he couldn’t ever be much more than that. He’s just a carpenter and his job, his status, his family, all of that defined him for the good folks in Nazareth.

And they closed their eyes to everything that had happened in the first five chapters of Mark’s gospel. It’s just Mary’s boy. But Mary’s boy healed a leper and healed Peter’s mother in law and cast evil spirits out of a man and healed a paralyzed man and healed a man’s dead and withered hand and spoke to a storm and caused the wind to stop and the waves to calm and cast a legion of demons out of another man and raised a dead girl back to life and healed a woman who had been sick for 12 years. That’s what Mary’s boy had done. That’s not your typical carpenter. But their refusal to look, their refusal to believe blinded them to the truth and then nothing offered in evidence would persuade them. They could have experienced the miraculous, but they convinced themselves he was only a carpenter and missed out on the life he offered to all who would receive him and believe. There are still a lot of citizens of Nazareth around in our day.

Who is this? I think it was C. S. Lewis who said either Jesus was a lunatic, a liar, or Lord. He was either insane because only an insane person would claim to be God in the flesh, the bread of life, the living water. Or if he wasn’t insane and deluded, then obviously he had to be a liar. But he didn’t show any of the characteristics of an habitual liar. When it would have made the most sense to lie to escape, he spoke the truth, even to his own detriment. He doesn’t fit the profile of a liar and no one ever caught him in a lie. But if he wasn’t a lunatic and if he wasn’t a liar, then it must be true

that he was what he said he was and he must be who he said he was. He must be the Messiah, our Savior and Lord.

Who is this? That's the question before us. This is the one who left the safety and security and glories of heaven to come and live among us, to make himself known to us, then to offer his life as a sacrifice to atone for our sin. He suffered untold agony, taking our place, dying upon the cross and satisfying the demands of justice, then he rose from the grave validating his claim and affirming indeed that he was Savior and Lord of life. Who is this? The evidence was before them, as it is before us and much depends upon the answer.

The third question was **From where is this? What is the source of this power?** I can hear them saying, "Here is the bottom line. We've known this guy all his life. He grew up around here. We know his family. He can't be the Messiah." Yes, but you have to ask and answer this question - where did this power come from? How are all these things happening? Guys from Nazareth don't raise the dead. So his homeboys in Nazareth have to decide what is this and who is this and where did all of this power and authority come from.

Some of the pharisees suggested Jesus was casting out devils by the power of the devil in Mark 3. That doesn't make much sense to me. Jesus said, "**How can Satan drive out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand...and if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.**" **Mark 3:23-26**

Jesus had power over sickness, disease, over demonic forces, over nature, over death. If he didn't get his power from the devil, it must have come from God. And if God gave him such power, doesn't it make sense that Jesus then must have been exactly whom he claimed to be? God wouldn't have given such power to a lunatic or a liar. He must be God's own Son, our Savior and Lord.

What, who, where. The evidence is hard to dispute for these folks in Nazareth, but they managed to do it.

They just couldn't bring themselves to admit the truth. They had already decided what they were going to believe and what they were going to allow and **Their answers limited what they could see, what they would believe and what they would**

receive. They answered the questions all right. “What is this? We don’t know, we can’t explain it, but it can’t be what you think it is. He can’t be the Messiah. Who is this? He’s just another man, like us. Just Mary’s boy, that’s all he can be.” But what about the miracles and the testimonies? What about this power he has? Where does that come from? “We don’t know, maybe Satan, maybe just some unexplainable force of nature, but we just know it can’t be from God.” Notice what the last phrase of verse 3 says, “**And they took offense at him.**” It literally says they stumbled over him or were tripped up by him.

He wasn’t what they expected. He didn’t seem very Messianic. He didn’t look royal or regal like the Messiah should look. He looked blue collar. He was a working class guy, a hometown boy, not a prince or a king so they stumbled over him. They tripped over him. He wasn’t even very religious, at least not in the way to which they were accustomed. So they took offense at him. Before we judge them too harshly, however... consider this with me.

I kept thinking about this being his hometown and about these people, so familiar with him and yet they took offense at him. Even his own family didn’t believe until after the resurrection (Mark 3:21 the family came to take him home because they said he was out of his mind.) His hometown was offended by him. I couldn’t help thinking perhaps we’ve done something similar. For some of us we grew up with him. We went to church and Sunday School and youth service every time the doors were open and we heard all the stories and memorized our bible verses. Then we got older and we realized we were going to have to ask and answer those three questions for ourselves.

What is this? Is this the truth? And then we stumbled over him. We were offended by him. We started thinking, “It couldn’t be this simple. This faith in a crucified Savior, it doesn’t seem very mystical, not esoteric enough, not exotic enough. Or maybe it’s too mystical, not practical enough. We stumble over it. It’s okay for the masses, for the unsophisticated and uninitiated, the naive, but I can’t accept it.” The strange thing to me is how many people have made statements similar to that and gone off looking in all the wrong places, searching in obscure religions and philosophies, trying to find hope and help and salvation when all along, the answer was right here in the One they left behind. The answer was right here in our hometown of Nazareth. But

they made a choice that blinded them to the truth and blinded them to what they could see, what they could believe and what they could receive.

Imagine those folks in Nazareth. “It works for the pagans in Gedara or the yokels around the sea of Galilee, but we can’t be fooled here in Nazareth, his hometown. We know.” And like those folks, blinded by our choice and blinded to the truth, we all miss the visitation of God’s son and his power to heal and to mend our lives and to give us hope and meaning and eternal life.

We’ve stumbled over him. We’ve ignored the evidence like the folks at Nazareth, refusing to believe. I can give you reasons I believe, for instance:

The testimony of the Old Testament and the Prophets- 333 prophecies - 456 details of the Christ

The testimony of the New Testament writers - eyewitnesses who died rather than recant their testimony.

The testimony of his forerunner, John the Baptist - “behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

The testimony of the angel Gabriel

The testimony of evil spirits that cried out ‘we know you are the Son of God - the holy one.

The testimony of Jesus Himself that he was the Christ

The testimony of God the Father

The testimony of His miracles, signs and wonders

The testimony of His resurrection from the dead..

But you can’t prove anything to folks who have already decided they will not believe. I know, none of us were there when those events took place. I can’t prove those things to the satisfaction of a skeptic. But I offer the one thing that I know for sure – look at the transformed lives that owe everything to his amazing grace. Everywhere he went, every life he touched, not just those in the gospels, but for the past 2,000 years. Look at the lives of those in this place. All of us who have placed our faith in Christ as Savior and Lord can testify of the transforming power of his life at work in our lives. You can say he’s just Mary’s baby boy, but you’ll still have to try to explain what Mary’s boy has done.

The folks in Nazareth took offense at him. I've been guilty of that. Maybe you have too. I've stumbled over him before. I made up my mind that things had to turn out exactly like I wanted and if they didn't, well, then, maybe he just wasn't really the God I thought he was. Unless we get the desired outcome then he just can't be God. The truth is, he can't be and won't be the god we are trying to create, but he is now and always will be the God that loved us and has come to save us and offers us abundant and eternal life through Christ.

Have we taken offense at him? Have we been ashamed at the simplicity of the gospel? Have we like the folks in Nazareth taken offense at Jesus' humility, his ordinariness among the people? One scholar wrote that the people of Nazareth desired, "an altogether glorious, supernatural Jesus whose credentials will be obvious to all, and refuse to believe that God discloses himself in the humanity of this one who is a member of a humble family and whose way, according to Mark's testimony is the way of the cross." We've stumbled at his commonness, but it is that very commonness that is the miracle. The incarnation, God became flesh and dwelt among us and made himself known to us. He came to us so we could know him and be made like him. Don't stumble over the grandest miracle and the greatest gift ever offered to you.

Have we taken offense at him? Things didn't turn out the way we wanted so we just wrote him off and decided he was just a carpenter and nothing more? Life hasn't been fair and we got offended at God and needed to blame someone so we blamed Jesus.

He didn't come through when we thought he should, or when we thought he would and we were offended by him. We stumbled because of him. It happens too often. It happened to the folks in Nazareth and look at the consequence: his mission was cut short. He was amazed at their lack of faith, at their refusal to believe and he could not do any miracles there. They missed their opportunity. They missed out on the blessings of God and his kingdom.

This was their choice, friends. The ones who were most familiar with him, who should have known him best, they missed it altogether. Some of you here today, you've grown up in church, in a godly home, you've studied the bible, you knew him, the way these folks knew Jesus, and yet, somewhere along the way, you took offense at

him and life hasn't been the same sense. You lost something and you know it. You are here today and although everything may look just fine on the outside, the truth is you are in pain, way down inside, you are hurting and wondering if you will ever recover. It's not too late to open your heart and life to him again. Welcome him back home to your heart, to your life.

Remember I mentioned that story Jesus shared about the prodigal son that had left home and wasted his life. Now broken by life he wants to come home but he is uncertain about how he would be received. He had taken offense at his old father and his foolish ways. He had blinded himself by his choices to the truth of his father's great love and kindness. But now, broken and desperate he makes the journey home and long before he makes it to the front porch, the father sees him coming down the road and runs to him and welcomes him back home. Bring a robe, a ring, shoes for his feet, kill the fatted calf and make a feast, my child who was lost has been found. Welcome home son, welcome home.

Someone here today, you've been a long way from home, from your father's house, but God is here to welcome you home if you will choose to come to him. Open your heart to him. Take that first step in faith and come to him and allow him to welcome you home in heavenly style.