

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

He marvelled Because Of Their Unbelief

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Mark 6:1-6

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Introduction:

Good morning church! Please turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of Mark chapter 6. You'll find that on page __ of your pew Bibles.

I believe that the text in front of us this morning is a timely word for us. It speaks to our complacency, faithlessness and apathy. I have been praying all week that God would use this text to rattle many people out of unbelief and into saving faith.

Faith lies at the heart of this text. We have heard over the last few weeks how Jesus ministered around the Sea of Galilee and even across the Sea in the Decapolis. Storms were stilled, demons were rebuked, bodies were healed and the dead were raised. The powerful, authoritative Jesus swept across the region and He demanded a response. After healing the demoniac Jesus commanded him:

““Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone marvelled.” (Mark 5:19–20 ESV)

Everyone marvelled.

But today's text presents an entirely different scenario. Jesus goes home to Nazareth, the city in which he was raised. And at the end of his visit, the God-man who left people marvelling at his power and authority stands back and marvels at what he has witnessed.

This morning, by God's grace we will read the text, explain the text, and apply the text. Look with me at Mark 6:1-6. Hear now from God's holy, inspired, inerrant, sufficient word.

He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ 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. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Now, as we turn our attention to the explanation of the word, let's look closely at what we have just read. There are some ideas here that we need to wrestle with before we can go any further.

Take, for instance, verse 3.

"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." (Mark 6:3 ESV)

The people who watched Jesus grow up – the ones who lived in the presence of a teenager who never sinned – not only rejected Jesus, but also took offense at him. In fact, Luke includes some extra details as to what the end of Jesus' visit in Nazareth really looked like.

²⁸ When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹ And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. (Luke 4:28-29 ESV)

They took offense at him. As we consider this text we must wrestle with the fact that people who spent years and years in the presence of Jesus still utterly and completely rejected him.

And look also at what is said in verse 5:

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. (Mark 6:5 ESV)

Let that sit with you for a moment. He could do no works there. What does that mean? Was Jesus attempting mighty faith healings but failing? Were his hands tied by the faithlessness of the people so that he was literally not able to perform miracles?

Before your mind spins wild into theological debates and pondering, let's consider what Matthew says in his parallel account. Speaking of the same visit to Nazareth, Matthew writes:

“And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.” (Matthew 13:58 ESV)

He provides some clarity there doesn't he? The emphasis is not on any lack of power on Jesus' part, but it is entirely on the faithless condition of the people. The Nazarenes did not receive the blessing and power of Jesus in the same way that the bleeding woman from last week's text did. Why is that? It's because the woman reached out in faith whereas the Nazarenes persisted in unbelief. She was rewarded, and they were judged.

This is God's economy. Those who respond in obedience and faith receive the blessings of God. Those who reject the person and work of Jesus Christ do not. Jesus said this very thing:

“For to the one who has, more will be given, and he will have an abundance, but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” (Matthew 13:12 ESV)

I think commentator William Lane hit the nail on the head when he said:

“The performance of miracles in the absence of faith could have resulted only in the aggravation of human guilt and the hardening of men's hearts against God.”¹

¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 204.

Or as the puritans used to say, “The same sun that melts the ice hardens the clay.” Jesus didn’t do mighty works in their midst because those miracles would have only served to further prove their hardness of heart.

This brings us to Jesus’ fascinating statement in verse 6:

And he marveled because of their unbelief. (Mark 6:6a ESV)

Faced with the cold, faithless rebellion of the Nazarenes, Jesus stood in bewilderment. The hardness of the human heart in its natural condition is awe-inspiring.

This is the text before us, and now we ask the question: How should this change us? With the time we have remaining I’d like to suggest four implications I see in this passage.

The first implication I see is that:

1. Proximity Does Not Produce Faith

It’s hard to miss this point. After listening to Jesus, and witnessing his power the crowd asks:

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. (Mark 6:3 ESV)

It was uncommon in this culture to refer to someone by referencing their mother. In fact, the name of your father would effectively function as your surname. I would be known as “Levi bar Tony” or “Levi son of Tony.” In fact, the whole sentence carries with it an undertone of dismissal and disregard. Commentator James Edwards notes:

“In actual practice, calling a person the son of a woman, as the Nazarenes do here, was not normal in Judaism, and was almost certainly insulting.”²

² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC; Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 172.

“Who is this who speaks with such authority? Jesus? The carpenter? The son of Mary? Don’t we know his brothers? Aren’t his sisters here with us? Why should we pay any attention to anything this ordinary carpenter has to say?” Not only did they disbelieve, but the text says that they were offended by him.

Here are a people who have seen a glimpse of the power of Jesus Christ. They know of him, superficially. Many of them would have watched him as he grew up. They’ve spent lots of time with regular people who are associated with him. They’ve heard stories about the amazing things that he’s done in the lives of others. They’ve even witnessed a few miracles themselves. But in spite of their proximity – even though they are situated in exactly the place where you would expect saving faith to flourish – they do not believe. And this persistent, rebellious, disbelief causes Jesus to marvel. The wind and wave calming, demon chasing, healing, resurrecting power of Jesus is right in front of their faces. They should be casting everything aside and clinging to him in faith, yet they take offense at him.

Proximity does not produce faith. There are too many stories of men and women who grew up in Christian homes, read bible stories with mom and dad and volunteered in youth groups who went on to reject Jesus. Christianity is not something that you are born into. Salvation does not come as the result of time spent in a church building or with church people. A Christian is a Christian because, by God’s grace, they turned from their sin and placed all their faith – all their trust – in the perfect life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The response of faith is a wonderful miracle because the second thing we discover in this text is that:

2. The Human Heart Is Amazingly Resistant to the Truth of the Gospel

This hardness of heart caused Jesus to marvel in disbelief. We’ve said before that Mark’s Gospel is really Peter’s account of his time with Jesus. Consider for a moment what Peter would have seen in this story. He’s looking at Jesus – the miracle working Son of God who speaks with such

authority that the wind and the waves obey. He's looking at Jesus, and he sees his master standing in wonder at the hardness of the human heart.

I remember back when I was in grade 7. My mother is an American who married a Canadian and my family decided that home would be north of the border. I remember coming home from school one day, a day when my teachers were disheveled and my friends and I were all very confused. It was September 11th. And I remember my mom's face when I came through the front door and into the kitchen; she was in disbelief. She was in awe. I suspect that's the closest my mind's eye can come to what Peter saw that day in the face of his master. Jesus, seeing the wickedness and the hardness of the human heart stood awestruck.

When I consider these Nazarenes I see familiar faces. How many people stand right at the cusp of the crowd for their entire lives, looking in, listening to Jesus but never surrendering to him? I suspect some of you are here today. You know that this is your position. You've grown up around the church and you've seen glimpses of God's power. You've heard the testimonies and perhaps you've sang along with the songs. But you have never been able to understand how it is that the people around you could trust so unwaveringly in Jesus.

“Isn't this the same simple story we heard in Sunday school? What right does Jesus have in claiming authority over my life?” Perhaps you use the same excuses that the Nazarenes used. In the same way that they pointed to Jesus' brothers and sisters to justify their disbelief, perhaps you have been using the lives of other Christians to justify yours. “If Jesus is so powerful to save then why is Bob still so short with his wife? And why is Tim still so crooked with his finances?” But you know as well as the Nazarenes did that your objection isn't really with Jesus' brothers or sisters or followers. Your objection is that you are not willing to surrender in faith to serve God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. You want to be your own God, and so you stand at the fringe of the crowd and hold tight to your disbelief.

To you who are hard-hearted, I want you to see in this text that:

3. Jesus Comes and He Calls

Over the past few weeks we have been reminded time and again of the way our Saviour comes for us. He climbed into the boat, sailed across the sea of Galilea and entered Gentile territory with tombs and pigs and demons and everything that should have dissuaded a good Jewish man. He came across the sea so that he could save a sinner who was without hope – a man who had been counted out by everyone, including himself.

Then he was confronted by Jairus, a synagogue ruler, a man who was firmly entrenched in a system that was actively persecuting Jesus. This man asked Jesus to come and to heal his daughter, and immediately Jesus went with him. He pressed through the crowds with this man and he entered into the home of this stranger and he brought Jairus' daughter back to life.

And now he has come into Nazareth, a small town with no more than 500 people. Nazareth is not a noteworthy place, in fact the only record we have of it is the record we find in the Bible. A common expression of the day was, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). No royalty or nobility would ever waste their time visiting such a place.

And yet, Jesus comes to Nazareth. He comes to them, and he tells them the good news of what he has come to accomplish. In Luke's account, he gives us the content of Jesus' sermon in Nazareth:

"And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:17–21 ESV)

Jesus unrolls the scroll and he says, "This is who I am. I am the one who brings good news to the poor, freedom to the captives and sight to the blind." Jesus is the hope of the world, and he comes to us and he calls us out of our darkness into his glorious light. He says:

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28 ESV)

He is calling you even now to experience his rest. And that rest is found as you place your faith in Jesus Christ. Believe that He is who He says He is. Believe that he lived a sinless life and died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sin. Have faith! It was by faith that Jesus brought that little girl back from the dead. It was by faith that the woman’s bleeding was healed. Jesus said that:

And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease.” (Mark 5:34 ESV)

Do you hear that? There was an enormous crowd pressing in on Jesus as he made his way to Jairus’ home and yet we are only told of one woman experiencing his saving power. Why is that? It was faith! This is just like the story in chapter 2 of the four friends who broke through the crowd, dug a hole in the roof and lowered their friend down to Jesus. Do you remember how Jesus responded to those men?

And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” (Mark 2:5 ESV)

Faith is God’s instrument for salvation. Those who do not have faith do not lay hold of Jesus. They don’t break through the crowd and dig through the roof to get to him. They stand at the outskirts, perhaps listening, perhaps even marveling, but the faithless never press in. Without faith you are separated from God; you’re on the outside looking in. Don’t stay there my friend because the final thing we discover in this text is that:

4. Jesus Leaves the Faithless

Look with me at how this verse concludes:

“And he went about among the villages teaching.” (Mark 6:6 ESV)

Jesus did not stay in Nazareth waiting for the Nazarenes to wrestle through their doubts. How many men and women hear the call of the gospel and waste years and years avoiding its

demands? “First let me have some fun while I’m still young,” they say. “When life slows down I’ll think about these things.” Who is to say that you will even have tomorrow? Jesus didn’t stick around in Nazareth. He came, he called, he marveled and then he left. If you think I’m being pushy, it was Jesus who said:

²⁴ “Work hard to enter the narrow door to God’s Kingdom, for many will try to enter but will fail. ²⁵ When the master of the house has locked the door, it will be too late. You will stand outside knocking and pleading, ‘Lord, open the door for us!’ But he will reply, ‘I don’t know you or where you come from.’ ²⁶ Then you will say, ‘But we ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.’ ²⁷ And he will reply, ‘I tell you, I don’t know you or where you come from. Get away from me, all you who do evil.’

²⁸ “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, for you will see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God, but you will be thrown out. ²⁹ And people will come from all over the world—from east and west, north and south—to take their places in the Kingdom of God. (Luke 14:24-29 ESV)

What a tragedy. It’s like a man who died of thirst not knowing that there was a well overflowing with water sitting right next to him. There is nothing more tragic than the person who spends their life sitting in the presence of Jesus but never laying hold of him in faith. Without faith you will not be saved! People from the North, South, East and West will be gathered together into the presence of God, but you will remain outside because the faithless will not inherit the Kingdom of God.

One day we will all stand before Him and we will be judged. On that day, our good works won’t save us. Our good reputation won’t save us. Our membership at a respectable church won’t save us. We will be saved by one thing, and one thing alone:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. (Eph. 2:8a ESV)

Saved by grace, through faith. We are saved as we trust in the completed work of Jesus Christ. We believe that, where we have sinned and fallen short, he has obeyed the law perfectly. We believe that he died on the cross as a substitute for the punishment that we deserve. We believe that we are accepted and loved by God, not because of anything intrinsically worthy or lovable within ourselves but because Jesus Christ is worthy and he has made us righteous and loved in God’s sight. And this gift of righteousness – this grace – is taken hold of by faith. So hear me, you who are standing outside the grace of God! Repent and believe! Turn away from your

faithlessness and your fear and your rebellion and cling to Christ! Believe in the Son and be saved!

Whether you are hearing the gospel for the first time, or for the hundredth time, the offer still stands. Perhaps even now there is a nagging voice in your spirit. You've tried to believe. You've tried to trust. But there is something inside of you that won't let you whole-heartedly surrender. You've raised your hand, said the prayer, but it never seems to stick. Let me read the rest of that text in Ephesians for you:

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. (Eph. 2:8-9 ESV)

Gift's aren't received as a reward for labor. Wages are the reward for labor, and when it comes to wages the Bible says,

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 6:23 ESV)

If you're looking to earn wages for your work, the Bible says that the only wage you'll receive is death. That's what we deserve. But praise God, He doesn't give His children what they deserve! Grace comes, not by striving, but by receiving.

So I plead with you today who are living in unbelief. Get down on your knees and ask God to soften your hard heart! Call out to Him in faith and ask Him to take what little faith you have and multiply it. Say with the apostles, "Lord! Increase our faith!" (Luke 17:5).

Don't waste another moment. The gospel is powerful to break your addictions, and it's powerful to break your pride. It's powerful to save your marriage. It's powerful to transform your home. It's powerful to redeem our city. It's more than enough to set every unlovable, scum-of-the-earth, sinner free. I know that it's true, because that's exactly who I was. But I received the gift of faith, and I hold that faith out to each one of you today. Will you look to Jesus and be saved? Or will he marvel at your unbelief? He comes. He calls. Will he find faith in you?

Let's pray together.