

“Spotting the Signs of Unbelief”

Mark 6:1-6

I want you to open your Bibles with me to the sixth chapter of Mark, and we will read beginning with verse 1. No matter how successful a person might become, there will always be those people who remember where you came from, what you used to do, and who you used to be. I read somewhere how Harrison Ford, before he became one of the most recognizable actors in the world, he was working as a carpenter trying to make a living in Southern California. Acting opportunities were scarce, and so he supported his small family by building cabinets and doing finish carpentry. He even did carpentry work for Hollywood producers and directors. One of those jobs resulted in an introduction to a man named George Lucas, and eventually he was cast as Han Solo in Star Wars. He then went on to become one of the biggest movie stars in history.

Imagine someone who hired Harrison Ford to build kitchen cabinets in 1974. To them, he wasn't a movie star. He was simply 'the guy who installed my kitchen cabinets.' If years later they still refused to acknowledge his accomplishments simply because they couldn't get past the fact that he was a carpenter, we would say they were letting familiarity blind them to reality. And that is exactly the way that it happened with Jesus here in Mark 6 and the people in His hometown of Nazareth. (Read)

In the preceding passages, we've seen how Jesus displays divine authority over nature, over demons, over illness, and over death itself. He is worshiped as Lord by Legion, He is welcomed as the Great Physician by the woman with the issue of blood, and He is witnessed as the One with power over death by Jairus. But among His hometown people of Nazareth, He is rejected. To them, He's just 'the carpenter.' Up until this point, we've seen how the crowds are amazed at the

Lord's unrivaled authority. Here, notice that it is Jesus who is said to be amazed at their unbelief.

What is unbelief? To put it simply, unbelief is the refusal to trust God despite sufficient evidence of His character, His word, and His works. Unbelief is the sinful disposition of the heart that rejects, doubts, or refuses to fully rely upon God, rest in His promises, and receive His Son. It is more than doubting the facts. Rather, it is refusing to trust and respond to Him in faith. Unbelief isn't merely an intellectual problem. It is fundamentally a problem of the heart and the will. Unbelief is choosing to trust in our feelings, fears, and assumptions more than God's Word. The Bible is full of examples of unbelief:

- Israel at the Red Sea (Ex. 14:10-12)

Unbelief panics in the presence of problems. Israel had already witnessed the plagues and God's deliverance from Egypt. Yet when Pharaoh's army approached they assume they're going to die. Unbelief forgets yesterday's provision when confronted with today's difficulty.

- Israel at Kadesh-barnea (Num. 13-14)

Unbelief likes to magnify obstacles. Twelve spies saw the same land, cities, giants, and fruit. Ten of them say, "We can't," while Joshua and Caleb say, "God can." The facts are the same, but their interpretation of those facts are different.

- Israel and the golden calf (Ex. 32:1-6)

Unbelief demands something it can see. Moses had been gone longer than the people expected, so they demanded a visible god. And their impatience exposes their unbelief.

- The disciples in the storm (Mark 4:35-41)

Unbelief questions God's care in the midst of crisis. The disciples don't merely fear the storm, but they question Jesus, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" The storm caused them to draw a false conclusion about His character.

- Peter walking on the water (Matt. 14:28-31)

Unbelief shifts its focus from Jesus. Peter actually walked on the water while looking toward Christ. But when he saw the wind, fear replaced confidence. Jesus asked, "Why did you doubt?" Unbelief means circumstances become more real to us than Christ.

- Thomas' skepticism (John 20:24-29)

Unbelief demands proof on its own terms. It was Thomas who said that unless he personally saw and touched Jesus' wounds, he would "never believe." He was establishing conditions for belief. Unbelief says to God, "I'll believe You when You satisfy my requirements."

And now here in this text, the people of Nazareth are in unbelief by allowing familiarity to produce contempt. Notice they heard Jesus' wisdom and knew about His mighty works, but they couldn't get beyond, "Is not this the carpenter?" In other words, "We know this guy. We know His family. And there's no way He could be the Messiah."

One of the characteristics of unbelief is that it will disguise itself. It does not always appear in a person's life as open atheism or outright rejection of God. Unbelief can exist in the heart of someone who attends church, knows the Bible, and even serves in ministry. Scripture portrays unbelief as a condition of the heart before it becomes a position of the mind. Unbelief is the default position of

fallen humanity, and even in the life of a saved man or woman, unbelief is something that has to be constantly battled.

I encounter people all the time who believe that Jesus is fully capable of saving them from sin, but they wrestle with whether or not He is able to sustain them in their daily life. We trust Him to take care of our eternity, but we question His ability to take care of our here and now. It is unbelief. And the prayer of the man whom we meet later in Mark 9 ought to be our prayer, “Lord, I believe—help my unbelief!”

From our text, I want to point out three signs of unbelief we see displayed by those in Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth. It isn’t altogether different from the unbelief displayed in our own lives at times.

1—Unbelief blinds us to the OBVIOUS (6:1-2)

“He went away from there and came to His hometown, and His disciples followed Him. 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?’”

The crowds had been following Him in Capernaum where He had been ministering. The last thing we saw involved the two people who come to Jesus out of desperation and in faith. Their faith is on display. To the woman who had the issue of blood, Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.” Then to Jairus, Jesus said, “Do not fear, only believe.” And so their faith is seen in contrast to the unbelief of those here in Nazareth. Upon having come to Nazareth, it seems that Jesus had to wait until the Sabbath day to do any teaching, which implies that there were no crowds flocking Him here, and there were no ‘faith filled’ people bringing their sick to Him to be healed.

Now, as far as places are concerned, Nazareth was not a very impressive place. It was more of a village than a city. Located roughly 20 miles southwest of Capernaum, it was more remote and isolated from the other towns throughout Galilee. It was situated on a hillside, off the beaten path. It was so insignificant that there is no mention of it anywhere in the Old Testament. In Jesus' day, it probably consisted of only a few hundred people and was known sort of as a backwater village. Like Nathanael's dismissive question in John 1:46 is, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" That seems to be the same attitude of the hometown crowd as well.

What is the evidence that they're confronted with? There is the evidence of His teaching. They are able to listen to His words in the synagogue and the authority they carry. They observe His wisdom which was unlike any other. Verse 2 says that many who heard Him were 'astonished,' and the word there means to be struck in mind. It was a real head-scratcher to them. So that they ask questions, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to Him?" They're left wondering how such a homegrown man had gained such wisdom. He was not the product of some rabbinical school where He had received formal training at the feet of some well-respected Rabbi. He wasn't from the priestly class or anything like that. For most of His life, He had been their local carpenter. But now He's speaking with such wisdom and ability.

In addition to the evidence of His words, there is also the evidence of His works. They go on to ask in verse 3, "How are such mighty works done by His hands?" Now, it is not because He has been performing miracles in the town, but because of the report that had gone out about Him. They had heard things. Remember how the religious authorities from Jerusalem had come to investigate, and they came to the conclusion that He was energized by satanic power. In 3:21, His

family had heard of what He had been doing, and they came to seize Him, assuming that He was out of His mind. Even though Nazareth was off the beaten path, the rumors had been swirling around.

And so as far as the people of Nazareth are concerned, He was untrained, unqualified in their culture to be a rabbi. He was just a carpenter. Someone they grew up around, they know His family, and yet He was manifesting this wisdom and power that they could not explain. They say in verse 3, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at Him.” In spite of all the evidence, they still do not believe. To them, He’s just Jesus, the son of Mary. And there may even be a little bit of insult in those words. Nobody special. Nobody but a carpenter. They look at the bare facts and come to a conclusion that was born out of their own familiar prejudice.

We don’t always come to the right conclusions on the facts alone, but we interpret facts based on our presuppositions. Presuppositions are simply assumptions that we make, and often they are unwarranted assumptions and they can lead us to wrong conclusions. For instance, suppose you send a friend a text, and hours go by without a response. The fact is they haven’t replied. You might assume, “They’re upset with me.” Or you might assume, “They’re probably busy.” And in both cases, your conclusion is driven by an assumption rather than the evidence itself. In life, we often do the same thing. We come to conclusions because of an assumption, not because of the evidence.

Imagine someone walking into church this morning already convinced in their mind that Christianity is not true. Every song, every sermon, and every testimony is filtered through that assumption. They don’t simply evaluate the evidence—they interpret the evidence through a lens that they have already chosen to see

through. And that's exactly what happens here in Nazareth. Their problem is not a lack of evidence. They had heard Jesus' teaching, witnessed His wisdom, and knew of His miracles. Their problem was that they had already made up their minds about who Jesus could not be. And as a result, their assumptions overruled the evidence. That's the way it is with most unbelievers. People have dismissed the faith, not on the basis of the evidence which they have examined for themselves, but because of an assumption which they already have. But there's something else to understand...

Ultimately, people reject the light because their deeds are evil. That's what Jesus says in John 3:

John 3:19-20—“And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For every one who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.”

Like a light switch suddenly flipped on in a dark room will reveal what is there. That's what Jesus does. He exposes our sin, pride, motives, selfishness, lust, greed, bitterness, self-righteousness, and rebellion. And that exposure forces a decision—will I repent, or will I remain in the darkness? Unbelief chooses to stay in darkness. And no matter the obvious evidence of who Jesus is and what He can do, holding on to their sin becomes more important. Unbelief blinds us to the obvious. Notice something else:

2—Unbelief distracts us with the FRIVOLOUS (6:3)

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?” And they took offense at Him.”

Look at the things they fixate on in verse 3. Is not this the carpenter? Is not this the son of Mary, and don't we know His brothers and sisters? The people of Nazareth had just encountered powerful evidence about Jesus in His words, His wisdom, and His works. But that's not what they focus on. Instead, they start talking about His occupation, His mother, His brothers, and His sisters. They can't explain His wisdom, they can't explain His miracles, but they can explain His background. And they dismiss Him on that basis. They take 'offense' at Him.

“Offense” —*it means stumbling block, to be put off; same word we get ‘scandalize’ from; the NT writers often use this word to describe the Jews’ reaction to Jesus’ death (Gal. 5:11; 1 Cor. 1:22-23)*

This same word shows up eight times in Mark, and in each instance it describes obstructions that prevent a person from coming to faith and following Jesus. The word points to a serious obstacle so that a person is unable to accept the truth of what is being said. The people in Nazareth are ‘scandalized’ to the extent that they reject the message as well as the Messenger. According to Luke 4, Jesus began His ministry in Nazareth by going into the synagogue and where He read from the scroll of Isaiah. And the people spoke well of Him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth. But then they say, “Is not this Joseph’s son?” The point that I’m trying to make here is that instead of dealing with the uncomfortable question, “Could Jesus actually be who He claims to be?” These in Nazareth become fixated with peripheral issues.

That’s what unbelief does. It distracts us with the frivolous by causing us to focus on secondary details so that we can avoid confronting the primary truth. People will refuse to come to faith and use some excuse like, “Tell me where Cain got his wife!” Or something else like that. Instead of dealing with the person and work of Jesus, they change the subject:

“What about all those hypocrites in the church?”

“Why are there so many denominations?”

“What about that preacher who fell morally?”

“What about dinosaurs?”

“What about this...what about that?”

Or, they'll raise questions and objections that come from their own personal hurts and experiences. If God exists, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why would He have allowed my child to get cancer? How can you claim the goodness of God despite my circumstances? I'm not saying that people don't have legitimate questions that sometimes deserve thoughtful answers. But they can also become smoke screens that allow someone to avoid the central issue:

What are you going to do with Jesus?

Because when you boil it all down, your salvation is not dependent upon whether or not God has a cure for cancer, or what the age of the earth is, or whether or not you have an answer for the deepest hurts you experience. All of that is peripheral to the central issue. What matters is what you do with the person and work of Jesus Christ. Which is why you don't need to be intimidated by the questions or the objections that other people raise to the gospel.

And so unbelief blinds us to the obvious, it distracts us with the frivolous, and then notice how:

3—Unbelief keeps us from the MIRACULOUS (6:4-6)

“And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.’ And He could do no mighty

work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. And He went about among the villages teaching.”

They hear what Jesus says, they watch what Jesus does, yet they stumble over the fact that He was one of them. It seemed so unlikely and laughable that God’s Son would grow up in Nazareth. So they take offense at Him. Instead of believing, they remain unbelieving. And in response to their dismissal of Him, Jesus says in verse 4, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” Its the same idea of how familiarity breeds contempt. Sometimes, we overlook a thing the more common and familiar that it is to us. And there may be a reason for that with the people in our lives. I mean, when you get close to other people, you will begin to see their inconsistencies and failures. But it wasn’t that way with Jesus. There was no inconsistency in His life, no sin, no outstanding debts, no list of wrongs committed by Him. And yet, He was just ‘the carpenter.’ No credentials, no list of achievements, nothing really outstanding on His resume. Just the village handyman! And in what I believe to be one the most tragic verses in all the Bible, verse 5 says, “And He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.” It is not that He didn’t want to. It is not that His power was limited, but that His purpose was limited. He could do no mighty work there just in the same way that a wise parent cannot give a disobedient child gifts until a rebellious spirit has been corrected. Listen to what one commentator writes:

Timothy Gombis — *“Scripture portrays a direct correlation between the presence and power of God and the receptive faith of God’s people. Where there is glad reception and a hearty embrace of God’s commands, God dwells there in power.*

Where there is resistance and rejection, God's presence is marginalized and muted."

The people of Nazareth are unwilling to believe. And as a result, Jesus does no mighty work there. Though they are the closest to Jesus in terms of proximity, at the same time they are among those farthest from Him.

James R. Edwards — *"We are again confronted with the mystery of the kingdom of God: some of those who have every opportunity to believe do not, and some who, like the Gerasene demoniac, would never be expected to believe do."*

Verse 6 says that He 'marveled' because of their unbelief. What amazes God about humanity is not its sinfulness and propensity for evil, but its hardness of heart. What amazes Him is our unwillingness to believe in Him.

Before I finish, let me make some closing application...

For some of you, the most difficult people to convince of your faith in Jesus are the members of your own family. For whatever reason, this Jesus who has become so very precious to you is nothing more than a bedtime story. They don't understand how you can waste your time with all that 'religious stuff.' And so they laugh at you. Or they may be offended by you. What do you do? I think there are two things:

- **Don't hide your testimony**

The life and light of Jesus Christ that has come to take up residence in you as a believer, don't hide it under a basket. Let those who are the closest to you see the fruit of the Spirit that you lacked before you met Jesus. Other people who don't believe are watching you. They're listening to you. For that reason, Peter says:

1 Peter 3:15—“But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.”

- **Don't lose your passion**

Don't let the cynicism of other people keep you from being a passionate witness for Jesus. Whether it is your family, or people you work with, or go to school with. Don't let the unbelief of people dim the enthusiasm and zeal you have for the things of God. They may test your patience, or try to drag you back into their ways of thinking and living all because that would make them more comfortable. But it might just be that they are watching you more closely than you think, and that your actions and reactions reveal how you have found something that is truly worth living for.

Years ago, Josh McDowell wrote a little book that has sold millions of copies around the world. Interestingly, he gave it a title that could have been taken straight out of this text from Mark 6: “More Than a Carpenter.” In that book, Josh McDowell tells his testimony of how before he came to faith in Christ he was a skeptic. He wanted evidence. He was drawn to a small group of people on the campus of the university he was attending, and how they seemed so full of life and purpose. It was something that he lacked. And so he came right out and asked one of the young women about it one day, and she told him that Jesus had made all the difference in her life. He said, “Don't give me any of that religion non-sense!” She responded, “I said Jesus made the difference, not religion.” And so he began to examine the claims of Jesus Christ and in particular the evidence surrounding His resurrection. And the more that he investigated, the more difficult it became for him simply to dismiss Jesus. Eventually, the question was no longer merely, “Is Christianity true?” The question became much more

personal: “What am I going to do with Jesus?” Once we seriously examine the evidence concerning Jesus, we cannot comfortably leave Him in the category of merely a good teacher, carpenter, or religious figure. His claims, His life, His death, and especially His resurrection force us to make a decision about who He really is.

Eddie Carswell and Russ Lee said it this way in a song:

*You can close your eyes
You can say it's a lie
You can stick your head in the sand
You can turn away, even try to explain
He was just another man
When they nailed Him to the cross by His hands and feet
and they put Him in the ground
Three days later everybody found out that you can't,
No, you can't keep a good man down!*

The reason is that He is more than a carpenter, He is more than a good man—He is the one and only God-Man. What are you personally going to do with Him?

And that's where Mark leaves us. The people of Nazareth had all the evidence they needed standing right in front of them, but unbelief kept them from seeing who Jesus really was. And the question this passage leaves us with is not, “What did Nazareth think about Jesus?” The question is, “What do you think about Jesus?” Is He just a carpenter? A teacher? A religious figure? Someone you grew up hearing about in church?

Or, is He who Scripture declares Him to be—the Son of God, the Savior of sinners, the risen Lord, and the King to whom every life must ultimately bow?

Why doesn't the name of Buddha, or the name of Mohammed, or anyone else offend people the way the name of Jesus does? The reason is that these other religious leaders didn't claim to be God. But Jesus did. And either He is, or He isn't.

Nazareth reminds us that you can be close to Jesus and still miss Him. You can know the stories and still not know the Savior. You can be familiar with His name and never surrender to His Lordship. Friend, don't make the mistake Nazareth made. He is more than a carpenter. He is more than the human son of Mary. He is the incarnate Son of God, the second member of the Trinity made flesh, and He has come to save us from our sin. And the most important decision you will ever make is what you will do with Jesus.