

## Who Then is This? Precious or Stumbling Block

### Mark 6:1-6

I may have told you about this series of books I've been reading to our oldest kids called The Wingfeather Saga, but we have really enjoyed these books. The books are about 3 kids, who are 9, 11, and 12 and they live in a fictional world, sort of like Lord of the Rings or Chronicles of Narnia. In the first book you meet these kids and you go throughout the whole book thinking these are just normal kids living in this world who have stumbled into a series of adventures. But at the end of the first book you find out these aren't normal kids. Their true identity is that they are children of the King and Queen and are royalty.

Now, once the others in the book know the identity of these three it absolutely changes how they respond to them. When people hear the news that these three kids are royalty, they can respond by rejecting that news or accepting it and acting accordingly. They can believe or persist in unbelief.

That's a little like what is happening in the Gospel of Mark so far. We've got mounting evidence that Jesus is the Son of God, the fulfillment of OT hopes and promises and people can respond to that with belief or persist in unbelief. Last week we saw two individuals in Mark 5 who responded with faith. They believed the news about Jesus and acted accordingly. In fact, we have read since Mark 4 of so many triumphs by Jesus, over nature, demons, sickness and death, it would be easy to start thinking that surely everyone will respond to all of this with repentance and faith. Not so.

Our current series has asked the question "Who Then is This?" and each sermon has contributed a little bit more to our understanding of Jesus and the call has been to respond to that understanding with faith. But today we will sort of get jerked back to reality. Not everyone will believe. In fact, sometimes those who in our minds are the most likely to believe will utterly reject Jesus and persist in aggressive and blind unbelief.

Last time we learned about faith, today we are going to learn about the opposite of faith, unbelief, in Mark 6:1-6. So, as you are turning there, today we are going to discover **two descriptions of unbelief that challenge us to believe God's Words.**

### **1. Rejects the Knowledge It Has (vs. 1-3)**

Sometimes people will act like unbelief is an honest virtue and its honest because “well, we just don’t know for sure that Jesus was God’s Son.” This section will show us that unbelief is never based on a lack of knowledge. It’s always based on a **rejection** of knowledge and **moral** opposition to the truth.

Look with me at 6:1. Where was Jesus coming away from? Well, we’ve seen him near the Sea of Galilee for the last several chapters. He’s actually been teaching by the Lake and going back and forth across the Lake. At this point he decides to move away from the Sea of Galilee and take a trip home. You can see here on the screen that this was around a 25-mile trip and would have taken several days of walking. Of course, in a way very typical of the time period, his twelve disciples went with him. What does he do when he arrives home in the town he grew up in?

Look at the first part of verse 2. Let me paint the picture of this a little bit for you. Remember, Jesus had grown up in Nazareth and hadn’t started his ministry till he was around 30 years of age. Nazareth was a small town, maybe 500 people, and he and his family would have been quite well known. Also remember that in 3:7-8 that word of his miracles had gone far and wide, well beyond Nazareth. As we’ll see in a few minutes, word about Jesus’ ministry had no doubt reached his hometown. He was a national celebrity and this would have been like the now famous local boy coming home. And he goes immediately to the synagogue and begins to do what he does best, teach.

But notice in verse 2 that it says he **began** to teach. I think that’s an indication that he wasn’t even able to finish because the people were astonished and interrupted him and began to ask one another all these questions. Look at the rest of verse 2.

Now, these first three questions seem to be pretty positive responses to Jesus and I think they were. Look what they ask him. First, they are basically listening to him teach with authority and wondering how he came to have such authority. He wasn’t formally trained with a Rabbi and he was a simple man, growing up in a working-class home in a small town, Nazareth. Second, they obviously see the wisdom in his teaching and wonder how he got it. Third, they have clearly gotten wind of the miracles he has done.

Now, as the readers of this story, I think Mark wants us to reflect on these questions based on what we have just read of Jesus up to this point in the Gospel of Mark. Our answers would be something like this, "Where did this man get these things?" From God! "What is the wisdom given to him?" It's God's wisdom! "How are such mighty works done by his hands?" Because He's the Son of God!

Obviously by asking these questions the people of Nazareth reveal that they have all the knowledge they need to make a right assessment of Jesus. They know he teaches with authority and wisdom and they know he performs miracles. They have the right information, the same information you and I have from reading Mark. So how do they respond? Look at verse 3.

Instead of focusing on what the questions of verse 2 reveal about him, they shift to thinking about him in terms of how they have always known him. The demons recognize him as the Son of God. The people of Nazareth can only see the Son of Mary. They can only think of him as the little boy and the carpenter they know. Look at the end of verse 3 at this summary of their reaction.

They took offense. This is the same root word that is often translated stumbling block. It's like when you walk through your house and trip over a toy that has been left on the floor and it causes you to fall to the ground.

They have the right facts, but they trip over their familiarity with Jesus and they won't let that knowledge turn into belief. Instead, they go the opposite direction and their knowledge hardens their hearts into offense. We've seen this before in Mark. Remember how the religious leaders responded to Jesus healing on the Sabbath in Mark 3:6? They witnessed the healing...and then decided to kill him.

This is where we circle back to our first description of unbelief. Unbelief is not based on a lack of data. Listen to this definition of unbelief: *"A willful and sinful setting of oneself against a biblical teaching."* It is willful and it is sinful.

Listen to Romans 1:19-23 where this is explained very clearly. Rejection of God is really about my heart wanting something else. There's a sense in which everyone knows that God exists and is powerful and that we are accountable to Him. But that knowledge is not faith. Faith is when we honor Him as God and worship Him as He deserves. Unbelief is when we act as if he doesn't exist and worship lesser things instead, including self.

Unbelief is the tendency of the human heart to say, "if only God would do it this way" or to say, "I just can't believe in a God who would act like that." Unbelief puts me in the driver's seat and as the judge of what is right and true in the universe, rather than taking God at his Word and accepting His ways.

As believers, we ought to be very careful in how we listen to and respond to God's Word. The people here stumbled over their familiarity with Jesus, but what about God's Word do you stumble over? What has God made clear that you just reject? Now, of course, we are good church goers so we would never reject God's Word vocally. But our lives often show that we really don't believe God's promises and warnings. We ought to come to God's Word with a readiness to believe and a heart that quickly puts to death any hint of offense at what God has said.

So, unbelief rejects the knowledge it has and instead trusts self. And because of that, unbelief fails to enter the kingdom and this is our second description.

## **2. Fails to Enter the Kingdom (vs. vs. 4-6)**

Jesus sees their offense and responds in verse 4. Look there. What is Jesus getting at with this little proverb here? It's essentially the same thing as our saying, "familiarity breeds contempt." You would think that those who had the most opportunity to be with Jesus during his lifetime would be the most likely to respond to His ministry with faith and trust but that isn't true. In fact, it almost works the opposite. If you continue to hear His teaching and witness His works and don't respond in faith, you will inoculate yourself to the reality of his ministry.

Look at the tragic results of their offense in verse 5. Now, it's vital for you to remember something we have talked about before and did again last week. The miracles Jesus performs are not just demonstrations of his power, they teach us about the kingdom and this is why faith is an important part of the miracles. Look back at 5:34. Jesus heals this woman, a demonstration of the nature of the kingdom, a place where sickness will be no more, because she has faith. The salvation of her soul and her body will be complete in the kingdom and we access the kingdom through faith.

So, in 6:5 Jesus doesn't perform mighty works because of the lack of faith. He wasn't going to do a bunch of miracles for people who had rejected his ministry in order to try to convince them he is God. That would put them in the place of

evaluation. Instead, Jesus calls for us to believe and when we take Him at His Word, we enter His kingdom and receive the benefits. But without faith, entrance into the kingdom is impossible. Why?

Faith is relational language. God doesn't just want people who know He exists. He wants men and women to enter into a relationship with Him. Every relationship requires some level of trust or faith. I cannot have a genuine business relationship with someone unless I trust them. God is calling people to enter His kingdom, which means to have eternal life. This means knowing God intimately and relationally. The nature of our relationship with God means rightly knowing who we are as humans and who He is. It means accepting what the Bible teaches about humanity being made in the image of God, our sin, and the work of Jesus to bring us into a relationship to Him. This is why God doesn't just write "I am Yahweh" in the sky for all to see. He gives us His Word and His Son to bring us into relationship with Him through faith.

This is why Jesus comes proclaiming the kingdom in 1:15. Entering the kingdom means entering into a covenant relationship with God in which he is king and I am his servant. Rejection of that kingdom and relationship is an act of cosmic treason. It's a rejection of God's grace and love and rightful authority in my life.

Look at the summary of this event in verse 6. Despite the fact that Jesus still does a few miracles the people continue to reject him and he marvels at their willful unbelief. So far in the gospel of Mark we have seen people react to the ministry of Jesus with amazement and astonishment. But this is the only time we see Jesus amazed and it's in regard to their unbelief. Here is another definition of unbelief:

*"Unbelief is the decision to live your life as if there is no God. It is a deliberate decision to reject Jesus Christ and all that He stands for." - Alister Mcgrath*

And this is exactly what this passage describes and this is what happens all over the world today. People take offense at some aspect of biblical teaching or the picture of Jesus given in Scripture and this leads to their rejection of biblical truth. Rejection of biblical truth hardens the heart and stiffens the will against the work of the Word and the Spirit and unbelief persists to the point of being a lifestyle and a way of being in the world. And this way of existing will not allow one to access the new life offered through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So, how does one move from unbelief to faith? What is the difference? It's not that some are smarter or more moral. It's not that you and I were able to figure this out and make the right call. Listen to 1 Corinthians 1:22-24. What is the difference between the offense and the power and wisdom of God? It's those who are called. God extends his call to men and women and gives them a new heart through faith.

So, this morning if you find yourself trusting in the person and work of Jesus for your eternal destiny, don't pat yourself on the back because you weren't the deciding factor in that. God called. He spoke and your dead heart was awakened by his spirit to see and believe the truth. If you are believing this morning this passage should do nothing but affirm your thankfulness for the graciousness of our God and cause us to speak the truth of the Gospel to those who persist in unbelief.

The question for us to end on this morning is the title of this sermon and an appropriate way to bring this series to a close. During this section of Mark we have seen again and again that Mark wrote in such a way that the reader would find himself asking, who is this? What is the identity of Jesus? The title of this sermon gives us the two options for our response. Is Jesus precious to you? Is he worthy and valuable or is he a stumbling block? Each and every person must answer that question in this life. And you may answer this question one way with your words, but your life is shouting something different. So my question for you this morning is, which answer is your life proclaiming to the world concerning the identity of Jesus?