

The Tragedy of Unbelief



Mark 6:1-6

We are continuing through the gospel according to Mark. Celisa and I have some favorite places that we like to eat. Sometimes, when we go to one of our favorite places where we don't eat that often, we enjoy an appetizer before the meal. Do any of you guys like appetizers from time to time before the meal? Sometime, we have to make a decision if we are going to have an appetizer before the meal, or are we going to have dessert after the meal? Usually, we try to choose one or the other, but I can't tell you how many times we've had the appetizer, then had the meal, and then went ahead and pigged out on the dessert as well. I don't know about you, but if Celisa and I go to Nashville to PF Chang's, (I recommend that restaurant if you've never been there) we can't have a meal there without having lettuce wraps and crab Rangoon as an appetizer. You've heard me talk enough, if we go to Paducah and go to Outback, we can never eat a steak without first having cheese fries. We love the cheese fries as an appetizer at Outback. If we swing by O'Charley's, I've got to have some of those potato skins before I can think about even what I'm going to order. Now I don't know about you, but there have been many times when we've made this comment. We like the appetizers so good at some restaurants that we think we could just order them as a meal. Have you ever had that thought? Let me tell you what I did a few weeks back. I had to run to Nashville to make a hospital visit and got to go to PJ Chang's. I was by myself; Celisa couldn't go with me. I sat down and thought about what I

was going to order. Am I going to order lettuce wraps or crab Rangoon before I order my Mongolian chicken? I just decided I couldn't choose, so I just decided to have appetizers as a meal. I did. I had lettuce wraps and crab Rangoon. When I left that restaurant, let me just say I was stuffed for the ride home. I'm saying all of that to say this; this morning, we're going to stand and look at Mark 6:1-6. I personally believe that Mark 6:1-6 is an appetizer. It's going to get us ready for the meal that's going to be served in the rest of this chapter. I didn't have time this morning to do an appetizer and a meal, so if you don't mind, we're just going to take an appetizer from God's Word and hope it will feed us like a meal. If you don't mind, let's stand and give our attention to God's Word as we open to Mark chapter 6, verses 1-6a. We're going to think about this topic today, a sad topic to follow what we talked about last week on Resurrection Sunday, but the title of the message is The Tragedy of Unbelief. Listen to what the Word of God says.

Scripture

"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? 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. 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."

(Prayer)

Father, what a tragic story. Father, I think it blows our mind as we read this, as we listen to this, as we try to ponder this thought that Jesus' hometown rejected Him. His hometown, the place where He was raised, the place He called home, the people who saw Him grow up rejected Him, did not believe. Wow. It blows our mind. Father, what we ultimately know is that You are telling this story to get us ready for the next story, and that's the story of the sending out of the disciples. Somehow, You are going to take this story and show us how Jesus was rejected to prepare His disciples and prepare the church that Mark was writing to, to be prepared for their rejection, even to the point that Jesus says sometimes you've just got to shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against those who do not accept, listen, or respond to the message we have about Your Son Jesus. Father, so many times, we want to take responsibility for someone else's unbelief, and You teach us in this passage that is just not on us. Father, I pray right now You use this sermon to let us see inside Jesus and His ministry, and how that encourages us as You send us out. But ultimately, Father, if there is anyone here this morning who is not a believer, I would just imagine that Jesus would marvel at how someone could not believe. Father, I pray this morning that You help us see the tragedy of unbelief. It's in Your precious, precious Son's name we pray, amen.

Jesus Marvels at the Centurion's Faith

I think most of us are familiar with the gospels. There are four of them, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Throughout the gospels, you just see people being amazed at Jesus, whether it's His teaching, one of His healings, whether it is the way He dealt with people. From time to time, one of the gospel writers pauses and talks about how people marveled at Jesus, and we can understand that. It's rare for the Bible to say Jesus marveled. As a matter of fact, one of the first times that Jesus marvels in the gospel of Matthew is when a centurion in Capernaum comes to Jesus

and says, Jesus, I want You to speak the word because I have a servant at home who is paralyzed. I know if You just speak the word, my servant would be healed because I recognize You are a man under authority, and You have authority because You are under authority. I, being a centurion, have authority because I'm under authority so that when I speak a word, the men under me do what I tell them to do because they know I'm under the authority of my leader. Therefore, I understand You are a man of authority because You are under authority, so just speak the word. When he first approached Jesus that he had a servant who was at home paralyzed and suffering, Jesus said I will come to your house. The man said no, no, no; You don't even have to come to your house, just speak a word. When Jesus heard this Gentile centurion say this, Matthew says Jesus marveled at the man. He actually turned to those around Him and He said...now remember, He is in the land of promise talking and ministering to God's own chosen people, and He says, "I have not seen a faith like this in all of Israel." Can you imagine how the Jewish crowd must have cringed to hear Jesus elevate a centurion to a place of faith and Jesus say I haven't seen faith like this in all of Israel? Jesus marveled at his faith. You and I sometimes marvel at people's faith. We marvel how sometimes the things that happen to certain people over such a long period of time at how they can continue to have faith, how they can continue to believe. We do that all the time.

In chapter 5, Jesus has cast out demons out of a man that went into a herd of swine. The swine went and committed *sooie*-cide, amen, and then He is on the way to a man with a sick daughter and He heals a lady with an issue of blood for twelve years. The girl dies. He not only has authority over demons, authority over disease, but He shows He has authority over death. Now, Jesus comes home. In our passage this morning, listen to this; I know it's the last statement in our passage, but it's the most important. Mark is going to give us an appetizer, and it's about unbelief. It's going to be surprising; it's going to be shocking, because there's a great crowd of people following Jesus. Everybody is flocking Jesus, yet it's still possible for people not just to hear about Jesus, but actually have Jesus in their presence and them not believe. It's going to shock Jesus. He's going to gaze in bewilderment. He's going to marvel at their unbelief. I don't know

about you, but I still marvel that Adam and Eve didn't believe. Have you ever thought about the tragedy of their unbelief, what it brought to their family, and what it brought to us as their extended family?

I'm still amazed at how the children of Israel could see God part the Red Sea, lead them across to where they don't even have to take their sandals off they just walk on dry ground, get ready to go into the promised land just over the Jordan River, (which is like a stream, a creek, literally, I've been there. It's not this mighty Mississippi, not like the Amazon River at all. Granted, it was a flood stage) and they don't have enough faith to take the land! They wander on this side of that *Waddi* for forty years! The whole generation who walked through the Red Sea crossing died in the wilderness because of unbelief. I still marvel at Achan, saw the walls of Jericho fall down before their very eyes, yet God had told them through Joshua that whatever you do, don't touch any of the cursed things. If you do, you'll bring a curse upon the nation and yourself. What did Achan do? He didn't believe God. What was the tragedy of his unbelief? Not just that he and his family lost their lives, but when the children of Israel went up against Ai, thirty-six men died. I marvel at that.

Jesus' Goes Home to Nazareth

I don't know about you, but do you get this picture? Jesus leaves Capernaum and He's getting ready to come back home. Do you remember what Luke tells us about the first time Jesus went to the synagogue in Nazareth, of His hometown, after He had been identified as the Messiah, after He identified Himself with us through John's baptism, after He went into the wilderness for forty days? He came back to Nazareth, went into the synagogue, opened up the Scriptures, read Isaiah, closed the Scriptures, and He said today this has been fulfilled in your ears. Before that sermon was over, they tried to kill Him. Hometown boy, first sermon, and they try to take Him outside and throw Him off the cliff. If you wonder why Mark tells us that the home base for training His disciples wasn't in Nazareth, it was in Capernaum, you probably see why. But now, He goes back home, leaves Capernaum, He's been on the other side, healed the man with the demons, went back to Capernaum, He left Jairus and his wife, the three closest to Him marveling at Him raising her from the dead,

and now He comes home. There should have been a big banner on the streets saying, "WELCOME HOME JESUS!" Amen! I mean one of the hometown kids, wow! He's grown up to be this man who is healing people. He's raising the dead. He's casting out demons. People are flocking to Him. Somehow, He gets away from the crowd, makes a twenty-five mile journey southwest from Capernaum to Nazareth on the *Via Maris*, which is the way of the sea. This was the major trade route of the day. When He comes into Nazareth, Mark says His disciples followed Him. Here's the picture. He's coming back home as a rabbi. He's coming back home as a teacher. Israel was familiar with people who wanted to study under other people. They didn't meet somewhere in a classroom. They didn't meet somewhere in a school. You literally attached yourself to that teacher, and you went wherever they went. When the teacher came and you saw those following him, those were his students. Boy, there's a significance in Jesus coming back home with His disciples following Him. The Sabbath comes and Jesus is in church at the synagogue, and He teaches.

We've already seen in the first part of Mark's gospel that they're amazed at His authority. In other gospels, they're going to say people have never heard anyone like this. We've never heard anyone teach like this.

Everybody is amazed at His teaching, so when Jesus begins to teach, Mark says people in Nazareth, his hometown, are astonished. That word, *astonish*, is a compound word that literally means at its root 'to hit, to strike, or to blast.' It's got a preposition in front of it that intensifies the word, but it's in the passive voice here, which means the people were hit, the people were struck, and the people were blasted. The point is Jesus is teaching and the reaction of the crowd is they are blown away. You know what it means to be blown away, right. They're blown away!

Questioning Jesus' Authority

Here's what they do. They begin to ask a series of questions. Where did this man get this teaching from? Where does His wisdom come from? How does He work miracles with His hands? Mark has already told us they don't believe, so these aren't good questions. These are the wrong questions. I like what John McArthur says in his sermon on this passage and he follows it up in his commentary. He says that unbelief obscures the obvious. I

mean if you're hearing a man teach like Jesus teaches, it ought to be obvious where He is getting His teaching. He is getting it from God, but they don't believe it comes from God so they're trying to find a source. Where? Where is His revelation coming from? How can this man take His hands and work the miracles He's doing? We know He's already been accused of working miracles because of Beelzebub, but that doesn't really fly. That's just not possible. So what is the obvious answer? The obvious answer is it is from God, but unbelief can't grasp what's obvious. Here's what John McArthur says unbelief does. It elevates the irrelevant.

Look at the next question. "Is not this the carpenter?" Wow. You know because of the questions they are asking, they're not elevating Him to a place of grandeur in saying is He not the carpenter. A carpenter in Nazareth would have had three sources of material: wood, stone, or metal. Most of us picture Jesus in a carpentry shop taking wood and making furniture and tables. He probably did, but if you ever went to that part of the world, you know that wood is scarce. Do you know what most things were made of? They were made of stone. It's very likely that Jesus not only worked with wood, He worked with a lot of stone. But in 155 AD, the early church actually said Jesus and His father, Joseph, were masters at making plows and yokes for animals. This word, carpenter, was a broad term in the biblical world. It was a word that we literally get our word, tech, from. The word literally means to be a maker, a producer. So they are kind of talking derogatorily about Jesus' profession. Up until about age thirty, He's been a carpenter, a stonemason, if you will. That's how He's made His living. Now they can't imagine a carpenter sitting down and teaching in the synagogue like He's teaching, so they are questioning where He got His wisdom and where He got His teaching from, He didn't get it around there. But that doesn't cause them to recognize who He is; it leads them not to see who He is. Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary? Whoa! Please trust me when I tell you this: in our household, when Kory is addressed as Celisa's son, that's good. Anytime Kory does something good, he's Celisa's son. You know the flip of that. When he used to do things bad, guess whose son he was; never hers...always mine. Very seldom during this time did you refer to a child as the mother's, especially boys, unless the mother was kin to someone like King David. They didn't

say is this not the carpenter the son of Joseph, which leads a lot of pastors, teachers, and scholars to believe that, possibly, Joseph is already dead, and he may be, but I don't believe that's what they're saying. You know what they're saying. It was the same things the Pharisees said to Jesus in John 8. When He confronted them about their sin and how they're in bond to sin and how they're related to their father, they look at Him and say at least we're not a son of fornication. You know what that means. They're questioning, 'oh yeah, is not this the carpenter, uh, we know who His mother is, but we don't really know who His daddy is.' You've got to remember that Nazareth was a town about like Hardin, Dexter at best, a town of about five hundred people. Jesus has been there His whole life. Some of them still remember the story of His mother, and how she was betrothed to Joseph and she got pregnant, and we've never really known who His daddy is. Did you know the Jews later started a rumor about Jesus that Mary, His mother, was led astray by a Gentile by the name of Pandora, and that was who is real dad was? They don't know who His dad is, but they know who His mom is and they just can't imagine someone of that birth, illegitimate, so to speak, His conception out of wedlock, that He can teach like He's teaching and do the miracles that He's doing. Then they say we know His brothers, and aren't His sisters still with us here in town? You get it.

Jesus Marvels at Nazareth's Unbelief

See, unbelief just has a way of making excuses on why not to believe. That is the tragedy of unbelief. Let me tell you what unbelief did in this little town. The hometown boy comes home, He's got His followers with Him, He's famous throughout the region, and they're offended at Him. They took offense at Him. He's teaching, and they take offense. The word, offense, literally means 'to stumble. Jesus is teaching and they are tripped up. This word in the Greek is where we get our word, scandal, from. They were scandalized. When Jesus saw them tripping all over Him, He just looks at them and says a prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown, among his relatives, and his immediate family. Listen to what Mark says. He could not do mighty works there, except He did heal a few people, cast out a few demons. That's what unbelief does. Unbelief stops

the flow of the supernatural power of God, according to Mark. Jesus marveled at their unbelief. He's amazed. He's staring, He's in a gaze, and He just can't believe they don't believe. Wow.

The Tragedy of Unbelief

Where are you at this morning? Does Jesus marvel at your faith? Does He say about you like He said about the centurion... 'Wow, I haven't seen a faith like this in all of Hardin!' Or, does He look at you and marvel that after all the signs He's given you after giving you the full revelation of Himself to you, you still don't believe? You just keep on making excuses. Paul wrote to the church at Rome and said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation unto everyone who believes." John said, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes should not perish but have everlasting life." He goes on to say in a few verses later that for those who do not believe, they are condemned already. Do you understand the tragedy of unbelief? Do you understand that if you don't believe, you can't blame anybody but yourself? Do you think you need a better witness? Uh-uh, Nazareth had Jesus in the flesh, and they didn't believe. Can I be totally honest with you? It's not your wife's fault, not your husband's fault, not your children's fault, not your parent's fault, not your teacher's fault, not your church's fault, or your pastor's fault that you don't believe. You don't believe because you don't want to believe. That's a tragedy. You'll never see the supernatural working of God taking you, a sinner, and transforming you into a saint, to continue to move you away from the old person you were in Adam, and mold you more and more into the image of Jesus Christ. You're going to miss out on all of that because you don't believe, and that's on you. John wrote an entire gospel to record the facts about Jesus so that ultimately, you would believe, and ultimately you would have life through His name. Mark is telling us all this neat stuff about Jesus, but he wants you to ultimately know that none of those neat things is going to bring you to faith in Christ. It is you have to stand at the foot of a cross and see the Son of God dying on a cross, trading places with you. Not just so you won't go to Hell and you will go to Heaven, but so that right now you can be saved from sin and the consequences of a self-centered life, and have the

abundant life of Jesus Christ right now. I pray the Spirit of God touches you if you are an unbeliever.

I don't think that's why the story is really written though. I think the story is written to us as believers. I think it's an appetizer to the next story, because here is the next story. Jesus is getting ready to send out the twelve. If you remember, in Mark chapter 3, He called twelve to Him that He desired, so they could sit with Him, learn from Him, and be sent out to preach and cast out demons. So the last thing those disciples see is hometown Jesus rejected. Now they are getting ready to get sent out, and guess what is going to happen to them. They are going to get rejected too. Do you know what's going to happen to you and me who get sent out? We're going to get rejected. I'm amazed, I really am, amazed sometimes how when we get rejected, we blame ourselves. I'm amazed how sometimes we really believe the reason someone doesn't go to church is because of the church, or another Christian. Are you kidding me? The reason people don't believe is because they don't want to believe. Just like the people in Nazareth, they will do whatever they need to do to justify their unbelief. But it didn't stop Jesus from being who He was and doing what He was supposed to do. I pray this morning that you and I, the church, the true church, will not let the unbelief of others to cause us to quit being who we are and quit doing what we're supposed to do.