

# Agnostic Nazarenes

## Ignorance and Insight: Part 1

Mark 6:1-6 (Mt.13:54-58 Luke 4:16-30?) 9/9/2018

Summary: In his hometown, the people acknowledged Jesus' supernatural wisdom and miraculous power, but didn't believe because he was a local handyman. Such an irrational conclusion is due to living by feeling instead of fact. They opted for agnosticism, which is an effort to justify ignorance. But when under authority, ignorance is not excusable. Jesus responded by moving on (a lesson for us in ministry).

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**Mark 6:1** Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. **2** When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. “Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him and such miraculous powers being done by his hands! **3** Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. **4** Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor.” **5** He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. **6** And he was amazed at their unbelief. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

## Introduction: Jesus Goes Home

### Mark 6:1 Jesus left there and went to his hometown<sup>1</sup>

Oh, this should be interesting. The last time Jesus saw his family, they thought he was crazy and he essentially disowned them. And now Jesus decides to make a trip back to his hometown, Nazareth, where they live.

### 1 ... and his disciples accompanied him.

He wants them to witness this—you'll see why at the end. So, the 13 of them start heading up into the hills. They leave that area around the Sea of Galilee and walk about 4 miles southwest to Gennesaret, then from there they got on the on ramp to the major north-south trade route known back then as the Way of the Sea, southbound. They stayed on that for about 7 miles to Magadan, then west through the break in the cliffs and up to the Horns of Hattin where the road bent southward toward Nazareth. And they arrive at this tiny little hamlet carved into the rocky hillside. And when I say "tiny," the whole town was about 500 yards by 500 yards. It was a nothing town—never mentioned anywhere in the OT, or by Josephus, or in the Jewish Mishna or Talmud. Most people back then probably never even heard of it.

## Amazement

### 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue<sup>2</sup>, and many<sup>3</sup> who heard him were amazed.

That's predictable. No matter where Jesus goes, everyone is always amazed at his teaching. And all through Mark that amazement has been cast in a negative light—it's not an adequate response to Jesus, and today we're going to find out why.

## The Evidence

In their amazement, the people of Nazareth ask themselves a flurry of questions in vv.2 and 3. The ones in verse 2 are positive and the ones in verse 3 are negative. Verse 2 is all the evidence in favor of Jesus; verse 3 is all the counter-evidence against Jesus. The people are in a state of confusion and ambivalence and mixed feelings. On the one hand, they have the plus side:

### 2 ... "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him and such miraculous powers being done by his hands!"

His astonishing teaching, his wisdom, his power to do miracles; they want to know—where did he get all that?

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<sup>1</sup> There is some debate about whether this is the same visit described in Luke 4:16-30. In both cases Jesus goes to Nazareth, preaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the people are impressed with his preaching but ultimately reject him, pointing out that he is a local, and Jesus makes a remark about a prophet being rejected in his hometown. On the other hand, some find it hard to imagine that Mark would fail to mention the attempt to kill Jesus, and they point out that Mark and Matthew both place the visit later in Jesus' ministry, whereas Luke places it early. One more difficulty with the view that they were two separate events is that it is hard to imagine that if they tried to kill him at the last visit, they would allow him to preach in the synagogue this time.

<sup>2</sup> This was Mark's last reference to Jesus' teaching in a synagogue. Later in the narrative the emphasis is placed on teaching in houses (7:17, 24; 9:33; 10:10; cf. 6:10).

<sup>3</sup> This does not imply that some were not amazed. Rather, it simply makes the point that it was a large number of people who were amazed ("many" is used the same way in 1:34).

## Wisdom

One thing they know for sure: it was **given** to him. They don't say, "What is this wisdom that he has?" they say, "What's this wisdom he's been given?" They could tell—this isn't the kind of wisdom a man could get just by hitting the books. It's not natural, it's not normal, it's not humanly attainable. It had to have come from something greater than a mere human mind.

In John 7:46 the temple guards said, "**No one ever spoke like this man.**" And those were his enemies. There have been some great communicators throughout history, but you take the best of the best (Shakespeare, Homer, whoever) and lay that alongside the sermon on the mount (or any other sermon Jesus preached) and there's no comparison. I don't know how anyone could read Jesus' words and think, "Oh, that's just a normal human being." 2000 years later, Jesus' words—every single one of them that we have, is studied by the most learned and brilliant scholars. No one in history has ever had wisdom anything like that.<sup>4</sup>

And he had no theological training or credentials, and yet when the most educated men of that day tried to stump him, off the top of his head Jesus gave answers that completely confounded and humiliated all of them—every time. He was never at a loss for words. He was never confused about what he should do next, or where he should go. He never did anything foolish. How often do you say or do something and then later say to yourself, "That was stupid. Why did I do that? Why did I say that—it was so dumb." You can search every action Jesus ever took, every decision he ever made, every word he ever spoke, and you won't find anything other than wisdom. And that even includes things he said and did when he was dead tired, running on no sleep, when he was being mistreated, beaten—it didn't matter. He never spoke or acted foolishly; he was wisdom personified.

When he spoke to people, he changed their lives. The discouraged went away encouraged. The feeble went away strengthened. The hopeless went away full of hope. The despised went away loved. The broken went away restored. The lowly went away honored. The ignorant went away instructed. The proud went away humbled. And the unbelieving went away rebuked. Perfect wisdom.

## Power

And not only supernatural wisdom, but also power.

### **2 ...What's this wisdom that has been given him and such miraculous powers being done by his hands!**

There was no doubt in their mind that Jesus' miracles were real. Modern critics deny them today because we are so many years removed that it's easier now to ignore the evidence, but back then, not even Jesus' enemies tried to deny them. Everybody knew for a fact that he was doing the miracles; the only question was, *how?* Where was that power coming from?

You take all the greatest miracle workers of the OT and none of them hold a candle to Jesus' miracles. He healed shriveled limbs, fever, internal bleeding, leprosy, insanity, deformities, edema, deafness, blindness, paralysis, every kind of disease—and did it all at will, in an instant. He drove out demons by the thousands, effortlessly. He restored broken, ruined lives. He read people's thoughts. He fed the multitude, turned water into wine, commanded the wind and the waves, walked on water, controlled fish—made them avoid the nets, then jump into the nets, have coins in their mouths, feed a multitude—he could do anything with a fish. He cursed a tree and made it wither in a matter of hours. He prophesied the details of his death, burial, and resurrection. At his arrest, he flattened an entire detachment of soldiers and police—knocked all of them flat on their backs with a word. He raised the dead, including himself. Jesus Christ raised himself from the dead. Then he ascended into heaven.

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<sup>4</sup> The writings of his Apostles are also studied to this day, but they were clear that they taught none of their own ideas; only what they had received from Jesus.

That's just a summary. To list all his miracles would fill up every book there is. Nobody living in Israel at that time was so detached from reality that they tried to deny Jesus' miracles.

So that was their question. "We know he has supernatural power and wisdom. Our question is, where did it come from?"

## Not an Honest Question

Now, was that an honest question? Did they really want to know the answer? No. If they really wanted to know where Jesus got his wisdom and power, they could have just raised their hand in the synagogue that day and said, "Hey Jesus, just curious, where did you get all your power and wisdom?" Either that, or they could just draw the obvious conclusion like Nicodemus did in John 3.

**John 3:2 ... "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no-one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him."**

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out. Where did it come from? God, obviously. Where else could it come from?<sup>5</sup> That's the only possible answer.

So why can't they see the obvious? Or why don't they at least ask? They don't ask because they don't want the answer. There is only one possible answer, and it's an answer they aren't ready to accept.

## The Obstacle

### Stumbling Block

Why not? Because there was an obstacle in their way. In v.2 they acknowledge Jesus power and wisdom, but then in v.3 they bring up some negatives. Take a look at the end of v.3.

**3 ...And they took offense at him.**

The word translated **took offense** means to run into an obstacle and be turned back.<sup>6</sup> You're driving down the road, you come to a giant boulder blocking the road, there's no way around it, so you turn around and go back the way you came. That's what the word means. They acknowledge Jesus' miracles and wisdom, they are on the road toward faith, but then they run into a giant boulder in v.3 that turns them back. They can't get past it. What's the obstacle? They describe it with three questions.

**3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon?<sup>7</sup> Aren't his sisters here with us?"<sup>8</sup> And they took offense at him.**

On one side of the scale you have the evidence in favor of Jesus: wisdom and power that could only come from God. That's pretty strong evidence on that side, right? But on the other side of the scale is the counter-evidence. What kind of counter-evidence could be so strong that overturns all the miracles and wisdom? Three things: he's a carpenter, he's Mary's son, and his siblings were there in Nazareth.

Now, is it just me, or does that make no sense? Jesus has omnipotent, miraculous power the likes of which the world has never seen, he's a greater miracle worker than Moses, Elijah, Elisha, and all the prophets all put together, but all that evidence is overturned because ... he's a carpenter?

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<sup>5</sup> The Scribes had earlier concluded his power came from Satan, a theory Jesus thoroughly debunked (Mark 3:22-27). And, while one might get some power from Satan, the devil could never give someone divine wisdom.

<sup>6</sup> By the time Mark wrote, this word group was often used to describe the reaction of Jews to Jesus' death (Rom 9:33; 1 Cor 1:23; Gal 5:11).

<sup>7</sup> James later became a believer and is probably the author of the book of James. Judas also became a believer and most likely wrote the book of Jude (Christians named Judas started going by Jude after Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus).

<sup>8</sup> The answer to that question is no—those aren't his real family members. His true mother, brothers, and sisters are those who do the will of God and follow him.

He has supernatural, divine wisdom the likes of which the world has never seen. His wisdom makes King Solomon look like a second grader. But he can't be from God because his sisters are here in town, and they know his mom? What kind of logic is that?

## Emotion

It's not logic. It's emotion. You see, all their lives they have had ideas of what the Messiah would be like when he came. And they look at Jesus and say, "I'm not feeling it. No way—too ordinary."

It wasn't like in the movies where Jesus has that "Jesus look." He looked just like everyone else. When Jesus showed up with Peter, James, and John, the people would have said, "Which one is Jesus?" "That one." "Really? Oh, I guess I didn't think he would be that short. I didn't expect such a big nose."

And the name Jesus was one of the most common names there were back then. Like, Mike, or Jim. "Yeah, this is Jimmy. He thinks he's the Messiah."

He was way too ordinary, and you can hear that in their language. Even in v.2, when it says **where did this man get these things?** The words "man" and "things" aren't in the Greek. Literally, it's **Where did this get all that?** He was an ordinary guy with an ordinary job.

## Carpenter

### 3 Isn't this the carpenter?<sup>9</sup>

This is a word that's a little broader than just carpenter. It literally means "builder," and it would include working with wood, stone, or metal. Jesus was a construction worker. And in a town this size (less than 500 people) Jesus probably would have been the only one in town. So Jesus would have had a wide range of skills to build or fix whatever needed fixing in town. Basically, he was a handyman. He had probably done work for most of these people over the years. "Yeah, there's Jesus the handyman (or Jim, the handyman). Just a couple years ago I hired him to fix my shutters. I remember he kept smacking his thumb with the hammer."

## Family

He was an ordinary looking guy with an ordinary name and an ordinary job. And he had an ordinary family.

### 3 ... Isn't this Mary's son<sup>10</sup> and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"

Evidently, Mary was a widow by this time. They look at Mary, and she's such an ordinary woman—how could one of her kids be anything special?

And they name Jesus' four brothers, and then mention his sisters. Jesus had at least three sisters. (Mary was a virgin when she had Jesus, but after that she had a bunch of kids by Joseph before he died.<sup>11</sup>)

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<sup>9</sup> According to Sirach 38:24–34, the wisdom of the scribe depends on the opportunity of leisure to study while the artisan is too much engaged in business to become wise. The artisan labors night and day and talks only of his work. Consequently, "they do not sit in the judges' seat, nor do they understand the decisions of the courts; they cannot expound discipline or judgment, and they are not found among the rulers" (Sir. 38:33, NRSV). The passage concludes by underscoring how different the one is who devotes himself entirely to the study of the law, and it goes on in 39:1–11 to glorify the scribe. (NIVAC)

<sup>10</sup> It was rare to refer to a man as his mother's son, rather than as his father's son—even if the father was dead, which was likely the case for Joseph at this point. It may be a subtle reference to the rumor that Jesus was illegitimate. Or perhaps they were slighting him as a kind of "mamma's boy." But I think it's also possible that they mention Mary simply because they were making the point that his family was right there with them, and Mary was standing there along with the rest of his family. So the point to her and say, "It's her boy."

<sup>11</sup> This is one of many times Scripture speaks of his brothers or sisters. Luke 2:17 refers to Jesus as her firstborn, and Matthew

And again, all his siblings were so familiar and so ordinary that they just couldn't imagine one of those kids could be anything special.

Remember Nathaniel's response when he first heard about Jesus?

**John 1:45 Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law ...Jesus of Nazareth ...." 46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked.**

Ironically, that's essentially what the people of Nazareth themselves are saying here. How could one of our hometown boys be anything great? Just like today—in order for someone to be an expert, he has to be from out of town.<sup>12</sup>

## Fact vs. Feeling

So that was the obstacle. The fact that Jesus was a common, low-born peasant. He looked so insignificant—kind of like, say, a mustard seed. Thoroughly unimpressive to look at. They had incontrovertible proof of who Jesus was, but when they looked at him, they had a bad feeling about it. It just didn't feel quite right.

So what do you do when the facts point one way, but your feelings point the other way? Most people go with their feelings, and they try to pretend that they are going by the facts. Either that, or they go with their feelings, believe what they want to believe, and then when you ask them, "What about the facts?" they say, "Oh, I'm agnostic about that." And that's the direction these people go. They don't come down hard against Jesus like the Scribes and say that Jesus got his power from the devil. No, they just ask a bunch of questions. "Where did he get all this? We don't know. What about the fact that he's a handyman? How could the Messiah be some local? What about this? What about that?" Just a whole bunch of questions that they don't really want the answers to. They just use them as an excuse not to have to acknowledge who Jesus is. When you don't want to believe, almost any excuse will do. Their lame excuse was they knew where Jesus was from. What if they didn't know? What if Jesus would have just appeared out of the blue—then would they believe? Listen to the excuse the people use in John 9.

**John 9:29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don't even know where he comes from.**

He can't be the Messiah because we don't know where he comes from. Meanwhile the people in Nazareth are saying, "He can't be the Messiah because we know where he comes from."

When you want to put off making a decision about Jesus, any excuse will do. But putting that decision off is a decision. It's a decision not to believe.

**6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.**

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1:25 says **Joseph did not have relations with her until she gave birth to a son.** See also Mark 3:31-34, Matthew 12:46-47, Luke 8:19-20, John 2:12, 7:3,5,10, Acts 1:14. The Greek term here (*adelphos*) can refer to other relatives, such as a cousin if the context calls for it, but the most natural meaning is brother, and nothing in the context here calls for anything other than that meaning. And if it does mean cousin here, then it would presumably mean the same thing in the next verse, which means Jesus was saying those who do the will of God are his mother or cousin, which would reduce the force of what he is saying. If you're a Christian, then you're either Jesus' mother or his cousin?

Also, 1 Corinthians 7 forbids abstinence within marriage, so Mary and Joseph would have been wrong to abstain.

<sup>12</sup> This might have been a pride issue as well. When you hear about someone like Donald Trump having success, that's not a threat to you because you can think, "He was born into a rich family, he had a lot of breaks, went to a prestigious school, etc." But if you find out that someone in your high school class just became governor of some state, you think, "Man, he's a governor and I'm a nobody." And it's kind of a blow to our pride. One writer admitted, "Every time someone I know succeeds, a little piece of me dies."

## Agnosticism

Agnosticism is one of the most popular ways people disguise their unbelief. Usually agnostics think they are being intellectual. Educated people will say, “I am an agnostic,” as if that were some kind of badge of honor. The word *agnostic* is a compound word. *Gnosis* refers to knowledge or understanding; the *a* in the front makes it negative, so it means no understanding or no knowledge. So another word for that is *ignoramus*. An agnostic is someone who says, “When it comes to the most important realities in the universe, I am ignorant.”

When someone tells me that, I don’t argue with them. I’m sure it’s true. But the amazing thing is, I have never once met an agnostic who is willing to take any responsibility for his ignorance about God. In fact, the whole point of agnosticism is to escape culpability for not knowing God. “I don’t know God. I don’t seek him, and I don’t want to seek him, and I don’t want to be held responsible for my ignorance of him, and so I will just sign on to a philosophy that says it is *impossible* for anyone to know God... , because if it is impossible to know him, then it is not my fault that I don’t know him, and I can just go on my merry way and live the way I want.”

But escaping responsibility isn’t that easy because if someone is an authority over you, ignorance is not an excuse for disobedience. If you get pulled over for driving 90 mph through a school zone, and you claim ignorance (“Sorry officer, I was unaware of the speed limit”), that doesn’t get you off the hook. You’re required to know the law. If you rob a bank, or murder someone and they come and arrest you, you can’t say, “Oh, laws against murder? I’m agnostic about legal matters.”

And if you have a responsibility to know the laws of the land, you have a far greater responsibility to know the laws of God, your Creator. Ignorance will not be an excuse on Judgment Day. And the law of God is this: you must place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If Jesus is who he claimed to be, all your allegiance belongs to him. Your life is his, your body is his, and your heart and soul belong to him. You are free to be ignorant about most things in life. If you don’t want to study microbiology, that’s your choice. But no one has the right to remain ignorant about the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Don’t Live by Feeling

And it is exceedingly foolish to ignore evidence and facts because of your feelings and impressions. So many of the things an eternal, omniscient, holy God does are going to be the opposite of what finite, sinful, limited beings like us would expect. So don’t go by your gut feelings. The word of God is infinitely more reliable than your own common sense.

When you struggle with doubts about God or about his word, isn’t it usually because you’re going by feelings? Something in the Bible just doesn’t seem true based on your experiences. Or some pain or disappointment makes you not want to believe because your angry. Few things will destroy your faith more than living by feelings.

## Jesus’ Response

### Only in His Hometown

**4 Jesus said to them, “Only in his hometown,<sup>13</sup> among his relatives and in his own house<sup>14</sup> is a prophet without honor.”**

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<sup>13</sup> This world is literally “fatherland,” and usually refers to one’s home country. The context shows that it does refer to Jesus hometown here, but the use of that term might be a subtle hint that the statement would later apply to the whole nation of Israel.

<sup>14</sup> These are like concentric circles. Hometown is the broadest, then relatives, then, the smallest circle—one’s own house. The implication seems to be that the closer in one gets to the prophet, the less respect the prophet receives.

Jesus is the ultimate prophet promised back in Deuteronomy 18:16-18. And his status as a prophet was obvious wherever he went, except in Nazareth. He's saying, "That's how blind and prejudiced you are—you're the only town in the whole country that can't see that I'm a prophet."

## A Bad Miracle Day

Then Mark says something really surprising.

**5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.**

He *couldn't* do miracles? Why not? Before we talk about that, I've got to say—I love that little caveat Mark gives. "He couldn't do any miracles ... except for a handful of healings." Just a handful of miraculous healings—that's like a bad day for Jesus. For me, if I were to perform just one miraculous healing, that would be amazing. The greatest miracle workers of the OT did a handful of miracles in their whole lifetime. But for Jesus, if he just does a few healings, he's having a bad miracle day. So much so that Mark says, "He basically didn't do anything there." Nothing but a handful of miracles—he might as well have just stayed in bed that day. That gives you an idea of how prolific Jesus' miracles were the rest of the time.

## Evidence of Truthfulness

But still, it's very odd that a gospel writer would say that Jesus *couldn't* do something. Passages like this are evidence of how honest and reliable the gospel writers were. The critics want to say that these aren't reliable accounts—they are just stories the church made up later on. One reason we know that's not true is passages like this. There is no way in the world the church would have made up a story that highlights Jesus' humble origins, and the fact that his own hometown and even his own family rejected him, and they would never make up a verse that said Jesus couldn't do miracles. If you're making up a story about Jesus being God, and you're trying to convince the world, you would never include passages like this, that are difficult to explain. The gospel writers were truthful men, and they told it how it was, no matter how it sounded.

## Why Couldn't Jesus Do More Miracles There?

So how do we explain this? Is Mark saying that Jesus' power was dependent on faith? So when people had faith, that charged him up like a battery, but when there was unbelief he became weak like a normal person? No. We know that's not the case for a few reasons.

First, if the power came from the faith, then Jesus wouldn't be needed. Jairus had faith, the woman with the hemorrhage had faith, but still, nothing happened until Jesus acted. The power doesn't come from faith; it comes from Jesus.

And we know Jesus doesn't need faith in order to use his power, because we just saw him still the storm even though the disciples had no faith. That didn't stop him. There is no mention of the demoniac having any faith when Jesus drove out the legion of demons. And the corpse of the dead girl at the end of ch.5 for sure didn't have any faith. Jesus has infinite power to do anything he wants any time he wants regardless of whether people have faith.

It definitely wasn't a lack of power that kept Jesus from doing more miracles in Nazareth, so what was it? The city of Capernaum didn't believe, but Jesus did a staggering number of miracles there.<sup>15</sup> What was different about Nazareth?

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<sup>15</sup> Some say this was to spare Nazareth judgment, because more revelation would have meant more severe judgment. But if that's the case, how do we explain all the miracles in Capernaum? Jesus said that because he did so many miracles there, they would be in a hotter hell than Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 11:23).



It's hard to say for sure, but one possibility is this: maybe Jesus could only heal a few, because only a few had enough faith to come to him for healing. Nowhere in the gospels does Jesus ever turn anyone away who came to him for healing. Some had strong faith, others had weak faith, but if they just had enough faith to at least come to Jesus, that's all he required, and he would heal them. I don't think crowds of sick people in Nazareth came for healing and Jesus said, "Sorry, I can only heal a few of you, the rest are out of luck." It sounds to me like what happened in Nazareth was only a handful of sick people even bothered to come to Jesus. So he healed them, but he couldn't heal anyone else, because no one else came.<sup>16</sup>

## Rejection

### **6 And he was amazed at their unbelief.<sup>17</sup>**

It was amazing to Jesus that anyone could be this hard-hearted. Amazing unbelief.

So how is Jesus going to respond? This is important, because his response teaches us how to handle rejection, which is why he brought his disciples along. He's going to teach them how to respond to rejection. After all those miracles Jesus did in ch.5, some of them might have been thinking, "Wow, this ministry is going to be a piece of cake. Every time there is a problem, Jesus will just do a miracle and fix everything and we'll be fine." Nope. They need to learn that the gospel will advance in the world in a context of mostly unbelief and rejection. This would have been a great encouragement for Mark's readers, who were suffering persecution at the time Mark wrote this. The rejection in Jesus hometown was just a foretaste of the rejection he would suffer at the hands of his entire home country, climaxing in the crucifixion, and the church would suffer the same rejection Jesus did by most people.

## When Rejected, Move On

So how does Jesus teach them to respond to rejection? Call down fire from heaven in judgment? No. Stay there and beg and plead with them? No. Try to figure out a more effective approach that can reach them where they are? No.

### **6 ... Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.**

He just moved on. And that is a basic principle for gospel ministry: preach to the interested. When people are so hard hearted that they just mock the message, or they get violent, or they become irrational—move on. There are plenty of people in the world who will soak up this message like a sponge. Don't keep beating your head against the wall with irrational, belligerent people. Go find someone who is receptive.

And if you doubt whether that is what Jesus is teaching here, look at the very next passage. Jesus finally send the Apostles out on their own to preach.

### **10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."<sup>18</sup>**

If they don't listen, move on. Now, how this is applied is a judgment call. We've all heard wonderful stories of missionaries who were rejected for years, but they didn't give up, and eventually there was a great harvest. So there can be exceptions to this, but as a general rule, we should focus our ministry on those who are receptive to our ministry.

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<sup>16</sup> The people in Nazareth did acknowledge Jesus' ability to work miracles but acknowledging something and acting on it are two different levels of faith.

<sup>17</sup> There are only two times in the whole Bible where it says Jesus was amazed at something. In Luke 7:9 when Jesus was amazed at a man's faith, and here, where Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith.

<sup>18</sup> Continuing on the theme, the next section is about the rejection of John the Baptist.

**Matthew 7:6 "Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces.**

That was Jesus' pattern, it was the Apostles' pattern, and that's the model for us.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

### Your Worst Sin

Have you gotten the sense in the last couple chapters that the only thing that really matters in life is faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Jesus rebukes the disciples for lack of faith in the storm, heals the woman because of her faith, and tells Jairus, "Don't be afraid, just believe." And now we get what might be the strongest statement of all.

#### **6 And [Jesus] was amazed at their unbelief.**

Of all the horrible atrocities that are reported in the Bible, this is the only sin in the whole Bible where it says it amazed Jesus. They were dumbfounded by his teaching; he was dumbfounded by their unbelief. What does that tell you about how important faith is?

Think for a second—what is the worst thing you've ever done? (I won't make you think about it for too long—just a few seconds.) You might be thinking of some sexual sin, or a crime you committed, a betrayal, something violent, where you hurt someone. Whatever it is you're thinking of, that might not be the worst thing you've ever done. The worst thing is unbelief. Whatever horrible act you might have committed, the unbelief behind it is a lot worse than the act itself. Unbelief is so evil that it was shocking to Jesus.

But if unbelief is that offensive to Christ, how pleasing it must be to him when we trust him. Never drive Jesus away by letting your feelings overpower your faith.

### Why Come as a Peasant?

One last thing: When they asked all those questions about how could the Messiah be such an ordinary man, they didn't really want an answer, but let's think for a minute about what the answer is. Why make it hard for people to believe by coming as a lowly peasant? Why not come as someone a little more believable as a savior—like an Alexander the Great type?

For one thing, Jesus came as an example of humility for us to follow. But another reason is this: part of his reason for becoming human was to sympathize with us in our weakness. You know that Jesus sympathizes with you in all your struggles, because he went through the hard knocks of life. If he came as some rich, powerful, glorious king, we wouldn't have the comfort of knowing that he has been through all the same struggles you go through, and as our sympathetic high priest, he has compassion on us as he intercedes for us with the Father.

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<sup>19</sup> This is a principle that should guide church ministry. Rather than coming up with ideas on how to attract students who have no interest in the gospel, youth groups should focus mainly on students who are interested in growing spiritually. Rather than trimming off the offensive corners of the gospel in order to attract huge crowds of "unchurched" people, churches should seek to feed the flock.