

TEXARKANA REFORMED BAPTIST CHURCH

MARK: FAMILIARITY BREEDS UNBELIEF

MARK 6.1-6

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1. Mark chapter 5 was a string of great victories for the Son of God over Disease, Death and the Devil. And of course there is more victory to come. But it would be a false picture of Jesus' ministry for us to envision Jesus going on from one victory to another without a hitch. Jesus faced constant opposition from evil spirits and evil men. The constant irony is that in the Gospels, those who should recognize Jesus as Messiah are those who oppose him the most. Why is this? Because, as we say, familiarity breeds contempt. So let's look at this story of familiarity breeding contempt.

THE TEXT

1. We last saw Jesus raising Jairus' daughter, possibly in Capernaum, and now Jesus makes the trek 25 miles southwest of Capernaum up into the hills, to his hometown of Nazareth. You will sometimes hear Jesus, in Scripture and outside of it, referred to as a "Nazarene."

2. Now Nazareth was not a happening place. It was a backwater, out of the way, nothing town in an area with a bad reputation. With regard to its insignificance listen to this quote:

"Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT, in Josephus, or in the rabbinic literature of the Mishnah and the Talmud. Outside the dozen references to it in the NT, it is first mentioned by an obscure writer, Julius Africanus, some two centuries after Jesus' birth. No church was built in Nazareth until the time of Constantine, AD325. Archeological excavations...have uncovered a series of grottoes that date to the time of Jesus. The resultant picture is of an obscure hamlet of earthen dwellings chopped into sixty acres of rocky hillside, with a total population of 500 at the most."

3. Even worse, Nazareth was a tiny village in the region of Galilee, which was known in part for its large gentile population; this resulted in a significant element of paganism and idolatry which drew the scorn of the more fastidious Jews of the south. Listen to another quote:

"That Jesus would have had at least some contact with Gentiles, in Nazareth and beyond, seems highly likely...For centuries after the Assyrian conquest of the Northern Kingdom in 721BC, Galilee had been converted to a predominantly Gentile populace, with a modicum of Jewish settlers entering the area only after the Maccabean revolt in the second century BC. The Gospel of Matthew still referred to the region as Galilee of the Gentiles."

4. Such was the hometown of the glorious Savior. No wonder then that Nathaniel, when he heard where Jesus was from, would remark, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

5. While in Nazareth the Sabbath comes around and Jesus is probably invited to teach in the synagogue as a visiting rabbi, since by now his reputation precedes him. And so he goes there to teach. No doubt the synagogue crowd would be interested to see the hometown-boy preaching.

6. Their response to his teaching is astonishment. Only it's not a good astonishment. They can't understand where Jesus, whom they all watched grow up, got his powers and wisdom. Don't forget Jesus is a 30 year old kid at this point; imagine some fifty year old friend of the family who knew Jesus from birth on; now here he is confounding the learned and having a reputation for miracles! Whereas we have seen people astonished with Jesus' power and wisdom in this Gospel, these folks are more interested in the source of that power and wisdom.

7. William Lane makes the interesting comment that only 3 chapters earlier Jesus was publically slandered as a satanic sorcerer; is it possible those fears still lingered in the minds of these people who thought they knew Jesus?

8. The impersonal way the people refer to Jesus probably reveals contempt for him; instead of using his name they call him, "This man." This is a familiar description in Biblical literature which expresses disgust for someone. Think of how the elder brother describes the prodigal son as, "This son of yours!" Or even now we might say, "Who is this guy?!" As if we were holding at arm's length a foul rodent.

9. Now the people mention miracles done by Jesus, and v5 says Jesus only performed a few there because of their unbelief, so it's likely they are referring to the reports of Jesus' powerful miracles from other places.

10. The Nazarene crowd then asks, "Isn't this the Carpenter?" This refers to the trade Jesus learned from Joseph, and that Jesus is called the carpenter and not the son of the carpenter is one more reason we believe Joseph must have been dead by this point.

11. Now when most of us hear of carpentry we probably think of wood working. We should, however, probably think of Joseph's and Jesus' work a little more broadly than that:

"Tekton is used primarily of workers in wood, though it can be applied to craftsmen of other sorts, such as masons, sculptors or smiths. In a small village the Tekton would need to be versatile, able to deal with agricultural and other implements and also with the construction and repair of buildings. As such he was a significant figure in the village economy, probably also undertaking skilled work in the surrounding area."

"Given the scarcity of wood and the prevalence of stone in Palestine, it would not be surprising if Jesus' trade included stonework as well as woodwork. Justin (100-165), however, says Jesus made "ploughs and yokes," taking tekton in the sense of carpenter."

12. So Jesus was a skilled manual laborer working in wood but also probably more. And while the Tekton was an important person in the community, maybe like a

Carpentry Contractor today, no one expected him to deliver learned speeches on theology and Scripture! They would think it ridiculous for such a man to present himself as a preacher.

13. But we also need to consider another part to this: Mark wrote this Gospel likely to a Roman Christian audience. While manual labor was well respected among the Jews, such was not the case in the Gentile world. Outside of the Jews manual labor was seen as demeaning, and calling Jesus a carpenter may have even been regarded as an attempt to discredit him. Interestingly, this very attempt was made by an opponent of the church names Celsus around 177AD, who reputedly "scoffed that the founder of the new religion was nothing but a carpenter by trade."

14. Without saying much about this here, I suggest this is just one more piece to the general shroud of lowliness which encompassed Jesus. When God became man he chose for himself a lowly family, and lowly village, and a lowly vocation. How strange then that we his followers might seek great things for ourselves!

15. The crowd also refers to Jesus very strangely as "son of Mary." I say strangely because generally in Jewish culture people were designated by their father not their mother. The question then arises what the crowd has in mind as they refer to Jesus this way. Listen to another quote on this issue:

"Judaism was a patronymic culture. The name of the father attached to the name of a male child was as usual and necessary as is a surname today. In Jesus' day men were occasionally called by the names of their mothers when she was more prominent, and evidently without the opprobrium of illegitimacy. But in practice it was unusual in Judaism to call someone the son of a woman, and was almost certainly insulting..it is clearly questionable, probably disrespectful, and may even insinuate illegitimacy."

16. So, very possibly, what we have here is a slur on the circumstances of Jesus' birth. Obviously most people would not accept Mary's explanation of how she became pregnant before marriage. The only other explanation would be that Mary

was an immoral woman and the family had lamely tried to cover it up. We know this continued as a slur on Jesus from other comments made in the Gospels, and after the time of the NT in the writings of opponents of the church. Calling Jesus "Son of Mary," then, serves to increase the scorn which is leveled at Jesus in his hometown.

17. There is a passing reference to Jesus' siblings, two of whom we know because they wrote NT letters, James and Jude. Jesus' sisters not being named apparently means they were already married at the time.

18. Well, we see in the end of v3 the crowd is offended by Jesus. This word means they were put off by Jesus, or even repulsed by Jesus. There is something in the whole situation which disgusts and irritates them. One writer says this word for offense is used 8 times in Mark and every time it speaks of an obstruction that prevents someone from coming to faith and following Jesus.

19. I remember once a female friend of mine had become engaged to be married. Someone was telling me about her fiancé, and they grew serious and told me this new fiancé had once been imprisoned for murder. I was repulsed by the idea; this dear female friend of mine, engaged to a murderer? It disgusted me and irritated me, and I didn't take to the whole thing easily. It prevented me from embracing this new fiancé and accepting the whole idea. The Nazarenes felt something similar about Jesus.

20. Jesus responds to this in v4 with a proverb which was well known, not only in the Jewish world but also among the gentiles; it was actually applied to Greek philosophers. "No prophet is honored in his hometown." This is like our saying, "Familiarity Breeds Contempt." Nazareth felt contempt for Jesus, having known him so long and being certain they knew all there was to know. Contempt means you believe someone is beneath your consideration, or worthless, or deserving of scorn. That's what Jesus' hometown felt about him.

21. We laugh when we read in v5 that all Jesus could do was heal a few sick people! Oh, is that all? Just worked a few miracles, did he?! Since most of us can't boast any miracles over a life time I think we'd be pretty excited by even those few in one day!

22. But not so fast! The careful reader of Mark's Gospel notices something new and ominous in this text, something totally different from what we've seen so far. To this point Jesus' powerful authority has knocked down obstacle, after obstacle, after obstacle, without any real challenge. He redeems sinners, diseased people, demoniacs, and the dead. So what is this we find in v5 that Jesus could do no miracle there? Has the authority of Jesus finally met a road block it can't remove?

23. Without a doubt, the purpose of this story is to highlight the horrible possibilities of unbelief. However, before we handle that, I know some will be curious how the text can say Jesus couldn't do miracles. Are we really to believe Jesus' power is limited by human unbelief?

24. This isn't the point of the text so I'll just make two quick remarks about this which at least might set us on track to an answer. First, sometimes when we say "cannot" we mean "will not". Example: I cannot eat a raw onion. Of course I actually do have the ability to eat a raw onion and would do so if urgent need arose. What I mean is that I hate onions so much that under most circumstances I refuse to eat them raw. Perhaps what we see here is Jesus saying, "I deal a certain way. When people believe, I bless with redemptive power. When people disbelieve, I withhold redemptive power."

25. And so on condition of the Nazarene's unbelief Jesus cannot, that is, according to the policy he has established, will not bless with redemptive power.

26. Second, it may be that the answer here is along the lines of Jesus' human limitations. In Jesus' human nature he is not infinite. Recall when Jesus states he does not know the time of the second coming. That is a limitation of knowledge in the Son of God, within his human nature. Is it possible then, that in his human

nature, he is limited in power when it comes to men's unbelief? Of course it would be otherwise in his divine nature; as God Jesus is able to open men's hearts to have faith in the first place. But perhaps we are witnessing a limitation of power in Jesus in terms of his human nature.

27. But either way, that is not the focus of the text. What this text wants to hold before our eyes is the marvelous unbelief of the Nazarenes. And that's about how Mark puts it in v6: Jesus marveled at their unbelief.

28. Now people marvel when they visit the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls. They marvel at the birth of a baby, or the demolition of a skyscraper, or the intricacy and detail of the human body and brain. People who have brains marvel that our planet can sustain life. Marveling is what you do when confronted by something of great size, power, genius, speed, or something otherwise remarkable, unusual, or singular. So get that thought in mind: The way you feel when you witness something that blows you away. Now: That's how Jesus feels when he witnesses unbelief.

29. It's interesting if you think through the Gospels how many times you find Jesus reacting strongly to someone's faith or lack of faith. It's obvious that the big issue of life for Jesus is whether people trust God or not. Honestly, I think Jesus would be bored to tears with a lot of the theological silliness we debate. I don't think Jesus would care much that Trump won the presidency, or that there's been another mass shooting, or that our medical science has advanced as far as it has. In other words, if Jesus came to visit I fully expect his interests would be completely different from the world, and sadly, from much of the church.

30. I think Jesus is intensely concerned with human faith or the lack thereof. And so once again in the Gospels we have Jesus deeply affected by the issue of human faith. That's the text. Let's close with application.

APPLICATION

1. One of the hottest questions in the media right now is why Stephen Paddock climbed to the 32nd story of a hotel and killed over 50 people while injuring over 500. Maybe they'll find an answer they like and maybe they won't. It won't occur to them to ask Jesus for an answer because the media is run by rebels who hate Jesus. If they did, however, I think I know what the answer would be.

2. The answer isn't mental illness. With some exception that term is a complete evasion of the real issues. The answer certainly isn't that the man lacked money or education; he was a very wealthy retired accountant. Nor is the answer that Stephen Paddock was "pure evil," as if he was the one bad person in Las Vegas that night and everyone else was a sparkling saint. Nor is the answer a lack of gun control. I never yet met a gun that didn't do what it was told, and of course no one seems to notice it was guns that ended the situation, namely, Paddock's own gun turned on himself as well as the host of guns on their way to his room, carried by the SWAT team.

3. I think the Bible would say Stephen Paddock did what he did, ultimately because of unbelief in Jesus. Unbelief is the source of sin and evil in our world, perhaps also the source of evil in the fall of Satan and his demons. In other words, the reason we're camped out here in a dangerous and tragic world is because people refuse to rest themselves in the care and in the command of God. They will not put their confidence in him, they will not believe his words, they will not surrender to his will, from the heart, in submissive faith like a humble child.

4. Ok. There's that. Now back to our text. Because the issue here is actually somewhat different from simple unbelief. We need to ask our text a question now to get deeper into what it wants to say. The question is this: "What caused the Nazarenes to distrust Jesus?" I've repeated the saying to you now more than once: "Familiarity breeds contempt." In other words, the more familiar someone is to us, the more potential there is for us to despise them. This doesn't always happen, but I

hope you know it happens a lot. We get to know people and spend a lot of time with them and before we know it we find ourselves irritated by their habits, and increasingly comfortable with telling them about our irritation.

5. Or put it this way: You think you know someone and so when they act out of character you sort of snicker and raise your eyebrows. "Cut it out! I know you! Quit pretending!"

6. Now listen: That's what caused Nazareth's marvelous unbelief: Familiarity. But now we have to modify it, because it's obvious they only thought they knew Jesus, but didn't really, so: Their unbelief was caused by Perceived Familiarity. They were sure they had Jesus figured and knew him well.

7. So now we come to our application: Is it possible we think we know Jesus but don't? Have we a long familiarity with him which has bred contempt or something close to it? What if we, like Nazareth, have long known about Jesus without experiencing his power, and have come to believe he's no more exceptional than anyone else?

8. Now realize what I'm saying here has special application to anyone who has had long association with the church. Have you grown up in church? Have you spent decades in church? Are your parents and grandparents Christians? Or have you long considered yourself a true follower of Jesus to the point where you feel confident you know who he is? If so, I'm talking to you. Let me read you quote:

"Exposure to Jesus and the Gospel is no guarantee of faith; indeed, apart from faith, exposure to the gospel inoculates as often as it enlivens."

9. You're not a Christian just because you come to church, even every week. On the contrary, if you have long resisted trusting Christ and surrendering your whole life to him, the Gospel has now begun to vaccinate you against Jesus. Do you know what inoculation is? It means I give you just enough of something to make sure you could never be fully infected with it. You come week after week and play with God,

pretend to be in on this thing, play your hypocrite game, and I assure you, God will not be mocked. What you're sowing, you are going to reap. Get ready for the whirlwind.

10. I've told you many times before: It is a dangerous thing to attend a Bible study or hear a Christian sermon. Very dangerous. Because no matter what, it is going to do something to you. Can you believe that as I speak my very words are in the hand of the Holy Spirit, and with them he is softening some of your hearts to trust and love the Lord more, and hardening some of your hearts to abhor, despise, be disgusted with Jesus more and more. Yes, my friends, it is happening in this very room as I speak; count on it.

11. We are not all Christians here. Please don't be confused. Some poor, benighted unbeliever is sitting here right now, totally convinced that you have us all fooled! Do you think we don't have eyes in our heads? We can see your lack of interest. We can see your lack of zeal and life. We might be stupid but we ain't that stupid. We can see you better than you can see you. You may have yourself deceived, you don't have us deceived! At least not in every case.

12. And as you sit here, unbeliever, week after week, getting just enough Jesus to be inoculated against him, back for your vaccination shots, the wrath of God is already moving you on closer to the mouth of hell, week after week. What's ironic is you're here to keep your spouse happy, or your parents happy, or to ease your guilty conscience! You think you can come here, refuse Jesus, but still use Jesus for your own personal ends. You're like the man whose wife slips poison into his drink, day after day, as he slowly sinks into sickness and eventually death, and no one can figure out why. But folks, that's the tragic nature of all sin. The sinner is a suicidal fool, ruining his whole life, and his whole eternity, for some worthless pot of stew. Or some man she met at work. Or some narcotic he won't be rid of. Or some worthless job that certainly will be no comfort to you as you lay dying. Indeed, try

to enjoy your sin then, when you see the spirits gather round your bed, to pull you into darkness.

13. I have very little doubt that we have folks sitting here very much like the Nazarenes. They have long known about Jesus without experiencing his power, and deep down they have no faith in his authority, but settled unbelief that there is nothing at all to Jesus Christ. To them, it's merely a name; it's much ado about nothing. Just as well to speculate about Santa Claus as to come here and talk about Jesus every Sunday.

14. Well, do you see him yet? Do you see Jesus as glorious? Has anything happened to you in the last hour? Do you see why the center of the universe is God Bleeding on a Cross? Christianity is pure nonsense to the person who is not awake to their wretchedness; even many new Christians don't quite see the point yet.

15. If you've been listening, and if the Holy Spirit has been pleased to act upon you, you just might get why the blood of Jesus is the sweetest drink some of us have ever had. Jesus is even willing to forgive the foul blasphemers who only come to church to use Jesus for their own personal ends. His blood was poured out for people just like you, fake-Christian. Your hypocrisy, your corrupt motives, your foolishness, your low regard for Jesus; all of it can be washed away. And when it is, you will finally see what this fool behind the pulpit is always droning on about. Heck, you'll even like church after that.

16. So, once more, Behold: The Son of God, nailed to the cross, bleeding for sinners; the love of God for the world, poured out, ready to receive enemies as sons and daughters, ready to forgive, ready to adopt, ready to clear the charges against you, ready to make you his own, and give you new life, and bring you out of the prison cell. That is the present state of affairs. Give yourself up for lost, come along quietly, believe what he says, and you'll have eternal life.