

There was an experiment at Stanford a number of years ago. They gave someone a list of songs and had the person tap out the melody. They had someone else try to guess what the song was. What they found was 2% of the people got it correct. Now that's not the interesting part of the experiment. What was interesting about the experiment was when they did the experiment; they asked the tappers to predict how accurate the guessers would be in guessing the song. The tappers predicted the guessers would be able to guess the name of the song about 50% of the time. But what they found was only 2% of the guessers were accurate.

It was interesting the tappers who knew the song, had a greater propensity to believe that the guesser, who didn't know the song, would guess it correctly than what was shown in the experiment. Researchers called this idea, the "Curse of Knowledge." This idea that those who knew the song could not imagine what it would be like to not know it. This "Curse of Knowledge" happens to us today. For example, you've driven a car, some of you for decades. If your child was learning how to drive a car and they asked you, "Well why do you do that? Why do you put your hand there? When do you put the blinker on? How far away from the turn do you put the blinker on?"

All that stuff you do, you don't even know why you do, but you do it. And it may be hard for you to understand what it would be like for you to not know how to do it. I'm learning how to play golf and I'm asking all these questions of people who have been playing for years. "Well wait, why did your hand go there and why did your arm go there?"

And they go, "I don't know man. That's just how I do it. I've been doing it that way for a long time."

Maybe you've trained someone at your job or office. It's their first day, they're like deer in headlights. They're asking all these questions that seem really straightforward. For example, "What are you doing? How often do you do that?" You're like, "I don't know, we just do it." And you have all this stuff that your used to doing, things you've mastered, things that have become part of your life and you can't imagine what it was like to be new—the "Curse of Knowledge."

The "Curse of Knowledge" even impacts how we do church. Our staff team, a lot of us have been around church a long time. We try to apply this principle by pushing back and disciplining ourselves as best we can, by thinking about how someone whose never been to church or someone who is giving church one last

chance, how they would hear this or think about this? It doesn't mean we've mastered it. It means we are trying to push ourselves to look at things from a different angle because it's easy to look at things from what we know. It's hard to put ourselves in someone else's shoes. To imagine what it would be to not know something.

We are going to look through the gospel of Matthew and we're going to see two stories. One about Jesus and his hometown in Nazareth, and another about Herod and Jesus' cousin John. In both stories, were going to see the danger of familiarity. The danger of a people who have a predetermined set of ideas of how the world works. And in their danger, they're missing out on exactly what is in front of them. They're missing out on how God is at work in their midst because they can't see any other way. That danger is for us too. We can miss out on God and how God is at work in all of the ordinary ways. The ways that we can we can consider ordinary—conversations that you have, people that you see everyday. I think God is at work in each of our stories. But the danger is familiarity. The danger is that we do not ask the questions we need to be asking. We can miss the wonder God is doing in someone's life. We can miss what that may mean and how God is at work in our life. What I want to do is read these two stories. I want to show you how God acts in familiar ways when he's familiar with us. Then I want to give you two practical steps you and I can do to push against the danger side of familiarity. Familiarity is good in some ways, but there's a danger to it that could lead to complacency. I'm going to give us some things we can do to push against that and see how God is at work in fresh and new ways.

We are in the gospel of Matthew towards the end of chapter thirteen. We are going to look at a story at the end of chapter thirteen and also at the beginning of chapter fourteen.

When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. (Matthew 13:53–54)

So he had just done a lot of teaching through parables. He moves on from there and he comes to his hometown, Nazareth. He begins to teach people in their synagogue and they were amazed. They said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" Here's the background to the story that Matthew tells us. Jesus was teaching parables and then he went home.

He was born in Bethlehem, but he grew up in this town called Nazareth. He went back to Nazareth and went into their synagogue. Now the synagogue was a religious space. It wasn't one of many in that area like we see today. It was the place for spiritual formation and community. It was an extension of temple worship in Jerusalem. This was the place where the town gathered to discover and learn about how they were the people of God.

Jesus shows up there and he teaches. They are amazed we're told, but also we begin to see a bit of skepticism start to build in them. Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? In other words, "We're amazed. We see God doing something, but at the same time, something seems off." We get more of their skepticism in the next set of verses.

"Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brother's James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters still with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. (verses 55–57a)

So Jesus goes back home and there's a bit of skepticism and they say, "Hang on, we know Jesus. This is the carpenter's son." An interesting thing, the town of Nazareth was quite small and it is likely that they only had one carpenter. In the original language, in the Greek, the article "the" carpenter's son is actually there which is pretty rare for Greek. The scholars say together with the article "the" and the size the village of ancient Nazareth was, there was probably just one carpenter. It was Jesus' dad, Joseph. Now he's not on the scene. People speculate as to why. Maybe he's passed away. Either way, they would know the carpenter of their town, that's Joseph's son. And probably if Joseph did pass away, Jesus took it on. So they would say, "Hang on, we know Jesus. In fact, we know all about his family. We know his mom's name. We know his brothers. His sisters are still living right over there. We know all about him."

These are people who would have seen him as a little six-year-old running through the streets playing games. They would have known his stories as a teenager growing up. They know Jesus. They've got an idea of whom Jesus is, what Jesus is saying, and what Jesus is doing doesn't fit their predetermined box of whom Jesus is. This doesn't work for them. You see this skepticism start to build. "He's only our carpenter. There's no way he is who he claims to be." They predetermined who Jesus should be, what Jesus was saying, and what Jesus was doing doesn't fit with whom they predetermined him to be. It's almost like they have a song in their mind and they couldn't imagine someone else wouldn't know that song.

Matthew said they were offended by Jesus. This word in the original language is *scandalizo*. In other words, they were scandalized by Jesus. It means to be offended or shocked by someone. A Bible commentator said in all the gospels the only person who scandalized anyone else was Jesus. People couldn't get their

mind around the things he was claiming and doing. The people of Nazareth were offended by him. Not because of the specifics of what he was saying, but because they could not match what he was claiming to what they had seen of him and determined him to be.

Jesus described the issue by stating a Proverb. The second half of verse 57 goes like this,

"But Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honor except his own town and in his own home."

Jesus said the issue at Nazareth was actually a life issue. This saying about Nazareth was common among the Greeks, it was common among the Romans, and it was common among the Jews. It's actually something still common today. We don't say these exact words, but we say something like this, "Familiarity breeds contempt." We still say this thousands of years later. Jesus said, "That is what's going on." Familiarity is breeding contempt. They can't get past who they have set Jesus up to be. We see that in our own day.

We would expect that the people closest to us would accept us. You would expect of all the places Jesus would go, his hometown would go "Finally he's here. Let's shut down the town. We're going to keep this guy. He's finally here." You would think there would be a celebration and a gathering. You'd think there would be something, but instead they are like, "He's not that special. We know all about him." Their familiarity bred contempt, cynicism, complacency and criticism. Psychologists have a term for this kind of idea. They call it habituation.

Habituation is this idea that when a new stimulus enters our environment we are hyper aware of it. But over time we get use to it and we forget it's even there. For example, if your married, maybe you remember back to when you first put your wedding ring on. For the first week or month, your body felt like you were going to the left. It felt like you were off kilter. What happens six months later is you don't even notice it. You get use to it. That's habituation. You get use to an environment at work. You start a new job in a new office and you're like deer in headlights. Everything is new—new people, new hallway, new break room, new whatever and then a few months later, you forget what it was like to be new. That's habituation.

There's a danger to the familiar. There's a danger when we set up predetermined boxes. There's a danger to this idea that nothing can change that for us. I think we've got to. I think we have to find ways to push against those predetermined boxes. The danger was true in Jesus' day and that was the problem with Nazareth.

In fact there is a similar in this gospel of John, where Philip meets Jesus and he goes back and tells this guy Nathaniel. Nathaniel's response to Phillip is this, "Everyone knows that nothing good can come from Nazareth."

People couldn't get past this idea that Jesus was something other than what they expected him to be. They couldn't get past it. The familiarity was a wall for them rather than an invitation. Habituation leads to a depletion of wonder. We get use to something and forget how wonderful and powerful it is. We've been using our building six or seven months now. I was in there the other night turning on the heat and thinking how amazing to use this building right downtown in Redwood City. We get use to things and we lose wonder. That is what was going on in Nazareth. They had lost wonder. They lost the ability to see that something more could be happening right in front of them.

That leads to a tragedy. Matthew puts the tragedy in these words in verse 58. It says that *"Jesus did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."*

Their unwillingness to get past their predetermined box of him meant that Jesus had to say, "Alright, I guess I'm going to head out now." That is incredibly tragic. They missed out on God in their midst because they couldn't get past how who they predetermined him to be. The familiar was a block rather than an invitation.

We see the same theme in the next story. It's different people, but the same theme runs through it. It involves Herod, who was a local Roman ruler of the region, and his interaction with Jesus' cousin, John; who people viewed as a prophet. Herod had a certain view of John and he couldn't get past it.

At that time Herod the tetrarch heard the reports about Jesus, and he said to one of his attendants, "This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead! That is why miraculous powers are at work in him." (Matthew 14:1–2)

Matthew goes back in time in the next set of verses and tell us how John died and what Herod is talking about here. Here is a little bit of background before we get into these verses. The conflict between Herod and John was this: Herod took a trip to Rome with his wife to visit his brother. He got to Rome and realized he wanted his brother's wife instead of his own. He seduced his brother's wife, got rid of his current wife, and came back to the region with his brother's wife—Herodias. They were married and John, when they got back, said it wasn't right. John said, "You can't be doing that." John made his grievance known publicly despite the position of power Herod held. Herod arrested John and you'll see what happens next.

Now Herod had arrested John and bound him and put him in prison because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, for John had been saying to him: "It is not lawful for you to have her." Herod wanted to kill John, but he was afraid of the people, because they considered John a prophet.

On Herod's birthday the daughter of Herodias danced for the guest and please Herod so much that he promised with an oath to give her whatever she asked. Prompted by her mother, she said,

"Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist." The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison. His head was brought in on a platter and given to the girl, who carried it to her mother. John's disciples came and took his body and buried it. Then they went and told Jesus. (verses 3–12)

There is a lot in these verses, but I wanted you to see for our purposes in this message, this all starts because Herod views John as a threat and that's it.

Herod said, "You're a threat. I don't want to hear any truth you have to say. You're just a threat." Herod dealt with that threat. Both stories end in tragedy. Both stories involve people who can't see past their predetermined boxes and both stories end in tragedy. There has to be a better way for people like you and me as we learn to follow and live like Jesus.

I see the better way in how God acts towards you and I. God is someone who knows us intimately. The biblical writers talk about how God created us and knows us. Here's the interesting thing is that God does something interesting and unique in his familiarity of us. The Psalmist in Psalm 139 tried to put words in this wonder of God in his familiarity of us.

**You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways. (Psalm 139:1–3)**

God is intimately familiar with you. I know what you're thinking. We just read two stories of what happens when people get familiar with someone else. God doesn't act like people do. The biblical story shows that the God who is familiar with you, the God who knows you and has searched you—He dies for you. God's familiarity of you leads to a selfless act of love for you.

He died on the cross so you can be renewed and have new life. God's familiarity of you is the place where his grace flourishes. That's really good news for you and me. That's how God views you. That's how God acts towards you. That's how God leverages familiarity. It doesn't breed contempt or condemnation. Biblical writers talk all about that. They say, "There's no more condemnation with God. Those who are in Christ, those who have accepted this free gift of life, of Jesus' death on the cross for you, condemnation is gone."

There's a new way to live with familiarity. To leverage familiarity is the ground where grace flourishes. That's what God has done for you. If this is how God acts towards us, it can set a path in how God acts in our relationships and our experience with familiarity.

What can we do in our relationships with the people we are around all the time? What are some ways that we can break familiarity that breeds contempt or complacency?

I want to give you two actions that can help you and me to push against familiarity that can lead to a loss of wonder.

1. **Ask questions.** You want to break the chain of familiarity that leads to contempt. Ask questions. Researchers say that children ask almost seventy questions a day. They say that adults ask seven. From childhood to adulthood you lose 90% interest in the world if those numbers are correct. It is ironic the more we grow in age, the less we ask of the world. Ask questions. When you encounter someone you see all the time in your life, think of a new phase in his or her life that you're curious about. For example, "Tell me what it was like for you as a teenager." They are going to go like, "What are you talking about?" You're stirring. You're breaking the bond of familiarity that's making you complacent with them. Find ways to ask questions. Asking questions break the bond of familiarity, which often leads to complacency or contempt or cynicism.
2. **Look for wonder.** Look for wonder all around you. There are people and experiences all around you. There are people with passion all around you who would love to tell you about their joy. My wife and I were at a function the other night and a person was sharing briefly that they work at the Marine Mammal Center in Sausalito. There were giving a little impromptu presentation about what they do and you could tell after about a minute that this guy loves what he does and was passionate about it. At the time, we were not thinking about marine mammals, we like them, but that wasn't what was on our agenda that night, but after a few minutes we were all for it. We were asking who do we give our money to? This guy was fired up. People have passions and joys they are willing to talk about. I saw the joy that God has made in him. Most everything he told me was something new I learned. I learned more about the beauty God

has created in this world. Everyone has a passion. It's finding ways to discipline ourselves to see the wonder. If you take time to read the bible, this is how you should read it. Read it through the lens of wonder.

Reading through some of the Old Testament prophets you find most of them are ordinary people who God called to speak something. I'm reading through the book of Amos, which is small and easy to pass over.

It starts out like this,

"The words of Amos, one of the shepherds of Tekoa—the vision he saw concerning Israel two years before the earthquake..." (Amos 1:1a)

I'm like hold on a second. This guy's so ordinary that you have to tell me his job, where he's from and you have to tie him to an historical event just to get context. This is the guy God is using to speak to people. I can't wait to see what God's going to say to someone like that. Here's the thing about interesting people. Interesting people are interested people. You can think of the most interesting people in your life and they are likely doing some of these things. They likely ask questions and look for wonder. They likely have not allowed familiarity to be a danger, but to be a platform to see something new and particularly to see something new in you.

My hope for us in reading all of this is that we wouldn't follow the way of the people in Nazareth. We wouldn't follow the way of people like Herod, but we would find a new way. We would find a new way where familiarity no longer breeds contempt or complacency, or cynicism, but is the ground for you and I to see how God is at work in someone's life in a new way. To see how God is at work in a situation in a whole new way. That's what he's done for you. God leveraged his familiarity of you to show you grace. And he's given us that same task to do in this world.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC South. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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