

If you had to narrow down the most important question that any human being could ask, what is that question? I think at my age, one of the most important questions I ask my daughters is which one of them is going to take care of Julie and me when we're old. But if I only got one question, what do you think that would be? The question is this, and it's what we've been talking about in the first six chapters here of Mark, "Who is Jesus?" And however we answer that question it carries with it eternal consequences. There is no more important question for a person to answer than who Jesus is.

As Mark has shown us, and he's made it so clear to us that the answer to that question is Jesus is the Son of God. Why is that important? Because once we embrace this radical truth, that Jesus, who walked the earth, who had a voice that could be heard, a body that could be touched, who got hungry, who got tired, who taught with wisdom that no one else had, who healed the sick, delivered the demon-possessed, who brought heaven to earth into everything he said or did, once we believe that Jesus is a Son of God, everything in our life changes. Our perspective changes completely. We think differently than the world about things that are going on in our personal lives, in our community, in our nation, and in the world.

In the scripture today, we will see amazing unbelief. When reading this we may think about what might have been had they believed, what would've been different. We're challenged by this to examine our own beliefs, faith, and allegiance to Jesus, the Son of God.

How do we encourage those that we know, and ourselves who struggle with our faith, who struggle in unbelief, struggle to trust God, and struggle with regrets? When we think about this question, we're certain that we have missed out on opportunities where if we had stepped out in faith, trusted, and believed, we would've made different life decisions. But we are to be encouraged because Jesus is the Son of God, and his mercies are new every morning. Great is his faithfulness!

Last week, Kevin taught us about some amazing miracles, amazing healings, and amazing faith in a beach city named Capernaum, which was Jesus' base of operations in his adult ministry. Remember he healed a woman who had been chronically sick for 12 years, and he healed a 12-year-old girl. He literally raised her from the dead. And after that, he and his disciples abruptly left Capernaum and traveled about 20 miles to the southwest, into Judea, to the small town of Nazareth. *"Jesus*

left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples" (Mark 6:1). The word hometown in Greek means, literally, one's native country, one's fatherland. This makes a clear reference that this was Jesus' place where he was raised.

Mark gives us this wording for hometown to express that this is representative of the entire nation of Israel with what transpires in these first six verses. We see here a lack of faith in Jesus, and it serves to represent this response of the people in this town, not just them, but the people in the nation. Mark says that he was accompanied by his disciples. As you might recall, Jesus was born in a little village named Bethlehem and God called his family to escape this crazy King Herod. So Joseph and Mary took their baby, Jesus, to Egypt to live there in relative safety until Herod was no longer a threat. Once King Herod died, Joseph moved his family back to the promised land area in Judea and resided in Nazareth.

Nazareth's had a population that probably topped at about 500 people. It was a little town built onto a hill of rock. It was the kind of town where everybody knew everybody. Nazareth was so insignificant that it's never mentioned in the Old Testament at all. It was no wonder that Nathan said when Philip took him to see Jesus of Nazareth, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" So Jesus grew up, lived, and worked in Nazareth until he was 30 years old. And like most boys, he learned his father's trade and went to work with his father. It's interesting because about five miles from Nazareth is the town of Sepphoris.

We haven't heard much about Sepphoris, but there was a huge construction project that was going on there because another Herod, Herod Antipas, decided he wanted to build this amazing palace in Sepphoris, where you can still see the ruins there today. And what did he need in order to build this palace? He needed builders, craftsmen, stone masons, and carpenters. So we're not sure why Joseph relocated from Egypt to Nazareth, but this could be a reason—steady work that would provide for his family.

So before we look at Mark 6, it's important to know that Mark 6 is the second time that Jesus, as an adult in his ministry, went back to Nazareth. The first time was about a year earlier, and it didn't go well. Jesus goes home. He reads a prophetic scripture on the Sabbath in the synagogue. A prophetic scripture from Isaiah that describes the Messiah. And then he tells everyone that he's the fulfillment of that prophecy. Basically, he tells them that he is the Son of God. Well, the worship service broke up immediately at that point; a mob formed and hauled him off to

a cliff. They were going to throw him off the cliff, which overlooked the valley of Armageddon. Kind of ironic. So I could see Jesus being literally carried out to that spot by this mob, and he is looking around and going, "Hey, you were my baseball coach growing up, you were my fourth-grade teacher, you were my scout leader, and they're just furious as they carry him because they couldn't didn't want to hear what he had to say. But it wasn't his time to die. Jesus was able to slip away.

So now we fast forward to Mark 6. It's one year later, and Jesus enters Nazareth again. This was his second and final time, and he wasn't there to visit his family. He brought his disciples with them to take them to Nazareth to teach the disciples some lessons about experiencing rejection because they follow Jesus. Lessons about the personal cost of following Jesus. A lesson about the powerful forces of faith but also the powerful forces of unbelief. And it's a lesson to prepare them.

In the following verses, we'll get a hint of Jesus preparing them for the great mission that Jesus will give them. "*When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed*" (Mark 6:2a). So that word amazed is a strong word, which is *plessonto* in Greek. It means to drive out of one sense by a sudden shock or strong feeling. And to make it even more strong, Mark puts the preposition *exe* in front of it, *explessonto*, which means basically that their minds were blown by what they heard from Jesus.

"*Where did this man get these things?*" they asked. "*What's this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?*" (Mark 6:2b). Notice they say this man instead of referring to him by his name, which was the polite thing to do. They obviously knew his name. They couldn't accept that these profound teachings from Jesus could have actually originated from him.

They don't deny the wisdom of his words. They don't deny his miracles that they'd heard about, but they couldn't comprehend that the miracles, the wisdom, could come from him. I mean, he was a powerful preacher. Jesus was always a powerful preacher. And when the recipients hear his message, they are compelled to respond.

Jesus calls people. This is his message. He calls people to God through repentance. He calls people to God by saying, "I am the Son of God and you can only come to the Father through me. You can only find life through me." And they knew the scriptures, so I imagine he was teaching things that were similar to what he taught the first time there. Certainly similar to the teachings that he gave to the Pharisees, Scribes, and the Sadducees.

In fact, here's an encounter we'll see in John 5:39-40. "*You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life.*"

Then in John 6:28-29, "*Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?' Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'*" To believe that Jesus is the Son of God corrects our perspective on everything.

So the people were shocked by his preaching. We see here that those people who were hearing his message were refusing to see the obvious. "Where did this man get these things?" Well, the only sensible answer to that question is from God. I mean, unbelief, and maybe you've seen it in your interactions with people who don't believe, who have yet to believe, unbelief will lead people everywhere except to the truth. It will lead people to everything except to what is obvious. They have hardened hearts. They raise up blinders to keep from seeing what is obviously right in front of them. Jesus asked Philip in John 14.

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. John 14:9-11

So Jesus is telling Philip, and he's telling us as well that we will know God, if we know Jesus, if we believe in him as the Son of God. So with that, you're called to believe. You're called to have faith. You're called to trust. You're called to have allegiance. You're called to arrange your life and priorities around Jesus, and you will connect with God.

"*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" (Mark 6:3). I kind of got some sympathy for them. They are struggling because they just see Jesus as a normal guy. These folks were having trouble moving from Jesus being a regular guy to Jesus being the Son of God. As they looked at him, they took offense at him.

This is the only place in scripture where Jesus is expressly called a carpenter. And it's not the best translation from the original language. The word for carpenter is translated from *tekton*, and it's a broad term for a builder, someone who works with their hands with wood, metal, or stone. It's a blue-collar worker, a craftsman who makes a yolk or a plow. But also, they could build something grand out of stone or could fix anything. So they see Jesus as this ordinary guy who should be carrying a lunch bucket like them and not a scroll.

They wondered why they should receive theology from someone who had no formal training. He wasn't a Pharisee or a Scribe, or a ruler in the synagogue. The Scriptures teaches that Jesus, I love the irony here, was a builder, a stone mason. And the Scriptures

teach that Jesus is the cornerstone, which is the key to the entire structure. And upon this cornerstone, the foundation is built, and the quality of the cornerstone makes the foundation strong. And then the structure is built upon that sound cornerstone. Isaiah prophesied about this cornerstone being Jesus in Isaiah 28:16. *"So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who relies on it will never be stricken with panic."*

I love how the Apostle Paul picks up on this. In Romans 9, he is probably thinking about this prophecy as he is talking about the nation of Israel. He writes, *"As it is written: "See, I lay in Zion a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall, and the one who believes in him will never be put to shame" (Romans 9:33).*

So Jesus is the stone mason and the stone, which the builders rejected. The nation rejected him as poor quality, but he actually was the quality cornerstone upon which everything rests. From that cornerstone comes the foundation, which is the words of the apostles and the prophets. And upon that foundation is built the church, you and I, and we are living stones building that structure upon the foundation upon that cornerstone.

Jesus's hometown folks, as well as that whole nation of Israel, didn't stand on that cornerstone. They stumbled over it. It caused them to fall. That cornerstone of Jesus is the very definition for us to be encouraged and where we go in these crazy times. It's a definition of what is right and wrong, what is true, and what is life, and what is death. And they couldn't do that because they wouldn't accept Jesus as a Son of God.

So the people stumbled, they stumbled over this person, and then they resorted to ridicule. They attacked his family, if you look at the culture and how they phrased things. To refer to a young man as the son of his mother and not his father, they said the son of Mary, was to imply that the son's birth was in question, possibly illegitimate. "Jesus, look at your family, look at your town. How could you be someone?" They questioned him about his vocation, his lack of education, and his family of origin.

They couldn't focus on Jesus' amazing teachings. They couldn't deny the miraculous works, but because their hearts were hardened, their heads were full of things that clouded their thinking. They had no clarity about what was real and what was refreshingly true and different about Jesus. They were looking at the world's way of solving problems of understanding life, of understanding all that matters. So they ask irrelevant questions. Isn't that what people do when they don't want to believe? They'll ask irrelevant questions that kind of circle around the topic to stay away from the main issue because they don't want to go there.

Little aside here, you know the miracle of the Virgin Birth of Jesus is foundational to our faith. It's one of the ways we can claim that Jesus is the Son of God. And we believe the scripture teaches that

Jesus, the Son of God, was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of Mary, who was a virgin. But I know some of us grew up in traditions that taught Mary remained a perpetual virgin her entire life. Our verses today tell us that Mary and Joseph had natural children after Jesus was born. Jesus here says he had four, I guess, technically, half-brothers. James, who eventually came to faith, accepted his brother as the Son of God, and became the head of the church in Jerusalem. Judas, also known as Jude, not Judas Iscariot, wrote his own New Testament letter. We don't know anything for certain about Joseph or Simon, but it said he had several half-sisters who were naturally born and raised by Mary and Joseph.

So back to verse 3, that last phrase, "they took offense," which in the original language, we get the word scandal. They were scandalized by Jesus. To be scandalized means to offend the moral sensibilities of someone. Jesus was offending their moral sensibilities. And Paul used that same word when he wrote about how the cross of Christ offends. Because the cross of Christ violates our sensibilities because it requires us to confess our sin, repent of our sin, and accept that we cannot save ourselves. We have to accept that Jesus is the only one who can save us. And the only way he can save us is for him to die on the cross for our sins. This is good news to those who believe, but it's a scandal, a stumbling block to those who don't.

Jesus made it clear. He said, I'm going to be hated because of this message, and he said to his followers, "You're going to be hated too, by those who refuse to believe in me as the Son of God, because those who refuse to believe will eventually turn on the messengers. And we've seen that throughout history, starting with the prophets and the Old Testament. Jesus warned his followers of this when he said, *"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first" (John 15:18).*

Back to Mark. *"Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home'" (Mark 6:4).* So what Jesus is sharing here is familiar to them. It's a familiar proverb in the vernacular. We would say, "familiarity breeds contempt." Now, I wasn't a Christian in high school, and I wasn't able to go to my ten-year reunion because I was on a missions trip, but I went to my 20th high school reunion, and some of the people there knew I was a pastor and served in the church, but not all of them new this. Somebody on the planning committee said, "Hey, could you do a prayer at the beginning of the reunion before we go to go into partying?" I said I would. So I get up there, and I'm looking at these people who are looking at me going, "Dan, Dan Reed? Is he a pastor? Boy, if I had a bet on that, I'd have lost."

A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home. It says, *"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them" (Mark 6:5).* I mean, to me, that's a big deal. I wish I saw a

few more sick people healed in my ministry, but we get the point here.

Notice that it doesn't say Jesus wouldn't do any miracles. Mark says, and it's very clear in the original, Jesus couldn't do any miracles. Really? Jesus couldn't do something. How could that be? Because I think what we're learning here is that there is a relationship between the power of God at work through our faith—the power of God works through our faith.

Now it's not always a reliable measure. Remember, God can do anything he wants to, anytime, whether we have faith or not, but there's an important correlation between God's power at work and our faith at work. I can't wrap my head around it except to say that our faith matters to God.

God's power is revealed through faithful people, and our prayers matter to God. God has chosen to use our prayers to advance his Kingdom purposes. I think verse five indicates this. This is so tragic that Jesus wanted to pour out his power, to pour out his blessing on his hometown folks, but because of their lack of faith, he gave just a trickle.

I think about us today. Who here would pray, "No, Lord, just give me a trickle. No, just give me a little of yourself. Just a little truth, just a little challenge, just a little accountability, just a little of the Holy Spirit. And isn't it true that God wants to do exceedingly abundantly more than I can ask or think? Paul tells us that in Ephesians.

It's a great question for each of us to ask that as we are challenged to become transformed people, transforming the Peninsula, do I want a trickle of God's power, or do I want a rushing torrent of God's power? When we try to keep God at a manageable distance, we get little belief, little trust, little allegiance, little evidence of God's power, a little blessing, maybe a little life change, maybe a little bit of joy, a little bit of love, a little bit of hope. Maybe a little taste of God's kingdom, but God offers us a flood. Are we okay with a trickle?

So the people were shut off from his power. "He was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:6a). That word amazed is *ethaumazen*, and it literally means "marveled." There are only two times in scripture that are recorded that Jesus marveled, that he had a feeling. The first was in Luke 7 when the Roman Centurion asked Jesus to heal his servant. And he looked at him, and he marveled, and he looked at the Jewish leadership around him. And he said in all of Israel; I haven't seen such great faith. He marveled. And the second time is here. He's amazed at the lack of faith in his hometown. Two times in the New Testament, one time, an example of the great faith of a Gentile. And the other time is an example of a lack of faith among his own people. And as the writer of Hebrew says, we cannot please God without faith. So a prayer that I journaled to God this week was, "I don't want you to ever be amazed at my unbelief, and God grow my faith so that I

won't miss opportunities to be blessed, miss opportunities to be blessed or to be a blessing to others."

There are powerful forces in faith and powerful forces in unbelief. The Bible is full of examples of the power of faith. Abraham believed, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Abraham said, "I believe I'm going to have a kid." And there was the power of faith that led Moses and the children of Israel to cross the Red Sea. And there was the power of faith that allowed David to slay Goliath with this little leather strip and a few little stones. And there was a power of faith that led this chronically ill woman for 12 years to touch Jesus' coat and be healed of her disease.

But there's also the power of unbelief, which is a force that the Bible is full of examples of as well. Our story today illustrates amazing unbelief with consequences. What about Adam and Eve? They chose not to believe God's promise, and the curse came upon them and then all of humanity. All of us suffered as a result of that unbelief. The world didn't believe Noah's call to repentance, and everybody but his family perished in the form of judgment of a flood. Moses and the Israelites' lack of faith kept them wandering in the wilderness for 40 years. Both faith and unbelief carry eternal consequences.

Maybe your prayer today is the same as that man in Mark 9. It starts where this man wanted to have Jesus pray for his son, who is demon-possessed, and heal and deliver him. And then he said this to Jesus, "Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'" (Mark 9:24). A lot of us can relate to that.

So what do we do when we're struggling with unbelief? I think there's some action in this. We have to make a choice. And so, one of the things I want to bring up is the practice of spiritual habits. We're going to hear more and more about that here at CPC in the fall.

I liken it to exercising daily in the sense that when we work out physically, we can see the progress of muscle gain and feel better. And when we don't, we see the exact opposite effect. But exercising spiritually does not always show up right away, but eventually, it forms us. This is why it's so important for me to sit quietly before God, pray, read my Bible, confess my sin, to live transparently in community, no matter how I might feel emotionally, no matter how much I want to withdraw and isolate. The more I work on developing these spiritual habits, the more my faith grows.

We also stretch our faith with bold action. We usually think of faith as being not something active. It's more just receiving and sitting, you know, in the quiet. But I've been a Christian for some time now, and I can talk a good game, but just talking about faith does not mean I have faith. I've learned that over the years, knowing about faith and having faith are two different things.

The second chapter of the book of James clearly states that faith and actions go together, and I've learned that the only way I can overcome unbelief is if I make a choice to follow God, even if it means following him and doing things that intimidate me or frighten me. I can feel completely inadequate to do that challenge. When I'm unbelieving, I play it safe. I don't take risks. I seek the most comfortable way possible. If we want to grow in faith, we have to challenge each other to take risks and do hard things.

Finally, find something to fight for. This has been stirring in me for a little while now as I sit quietly and pray. What fight is worth fighting for? What Kingdom cause keeps coming into your heart, that you're retreating from, and that, you know, deep down, God can use you to make a difference? I think all of us have had these battles in our lives that we would rather avoid. But avoiding our battles keep us from moving forward in faith, no matter what that battle is, and no matter what the outcome of that fight is if we're trusting God, he is moving us closer to him in the process of that battle.

So my quiet time, my devotional life, cannot be measured by time spent or chapters read. Faith in God is what I'm after—trust, choosing my allegiance and my priorities to align with him.

A proper view of Jesus leads us to trust him and will bring us God's power.

We can't understand life if we don't start with faith in God. God is the center of our lives. Knowing God is embracing the truth and the person and the work of Jesus, the Son of God.

So I asked this question, "Do you really believe that? Do you really believe that Jesus is the Son of God?" You've been given everything you need for life and godliness, to look at things through his lens and not through the world's lens. Do you believe that capacity is there? It's a biblical promise. One of my favorite scriptures, 2 Peter 1:3, "*His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.*"

So as a parent this week, did you actually believe this truth? Did you live with confidence and courage? Did you persevere? Did your faith help you through the challenges? Did you get a glimpse of his power in some way? Did you have hope not because your children are easy to parent but because you believe in the truth of the gospel, and you believe that you've been supplied with everything you need? You have that conversation with them or that correction with them for the thousandth time. And you are glad that you've been supplied with the task that you have as a parent.

Or do you walk down the hallway, throw your hands up and say, I can't believe I have to do this again. I just can't take it. I'm way beyond, you know, fill in the blank, whatever you say to yourself. How about your marriage? Maybe it's not everything it's supposed to be, but do you live with hope? Are you encouraged in that marriage because you believe the radical claims of Jesus, that he's the Son of God, the radical claims of the gospel that because of the power of God, repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation is possible in a marriage? Because you believe Jesus is the Son of God, and following him is the most important priority in your marriage.

Do you embrace the call of the gospel? Jesus didn't come just to make your kingdom a little better, but he invites you to join with him in a better kingdom in his Kingdom. and the greatest thrill in your life should not be getting your own way. Your greatest thrill should be the advancement of the Kingdom of God.

If you believe Jesus is the son of God, and it may not be hard for you to serve or work in the church, but do you give liberally to the work of God because you believe in the call of the gospel, and you're excited about that? Does that affect how you use your time? Does that affect your finances? Does your money become more important to you than God's call?

Lord. I know in our hearts that there's this battle in all of us between faith and unbelief. Lord, we are given your Spirit to reflect and to reveal. Are our hearts being shaped and molded by the power of faith or the power of unbelief? Is there another authority that we run to in this war, where we run away from faith?

And maybe it's in a very specific area of your life where the power of unbelief is so strong. We began with a question, Who is Jesus? And I want to challenge you to pray a prayer this week:

Jesus, I believe you are the Son of God. I believe you are the Son of God in my workplace, in my classroom, in my marriage, in my parenting, in my life goals, in my financial planning, and in my private thought life.

And Lord, may you have your way with us, may our faith be pleasing to you. And we know that even a small, amount of faith can be pleasing to you. Faith the size of a mustard seed is pleasing to you and Lord, may your power become more evident in our lives and through our lives As we lean into you and trust. Show us where we specifically need to step out and risk and then give us the faith to trust you to overcome it and to do it. Lead us to trust you. And may you see us as faithful, and may we see your power working in our lives.

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

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