

### Mark 6:1-6 “Doubly Amazed”

Today’s scripture called for the prescribed reading through verse 13, but after praying and reflecting on God’s Word, I have restricted myself to the first six verses here in the sixth Chapter of Mark. After the awe-inspiring three miracle stories of Chapter 5, we now encounter a different kind of amazement in the sixth chapter of Mark. This time, it's not the awe of witnessing Jesus' power but the amazement of disbelief that shrouds Jesus' hometown. One would expect the people to be proud of their native son, but they fail to welcome him on this particular visit. Jesus returned home to carry out his work of public ministry, authoritative teaching, and wondrous miracles among people who 'knew him when.' Yet, despite their familiarity with him, they struggle to accept his authority and teachings, much to Jesus' reflective surprise and amazement.

The small community of Nazareth, where everyone knew each other, was not conducive to new ideas. I had to laugh when I re-read what I wrote, thinking about the television series “*Cheers*,” where everyone knows your name. Anyhow, that’s another story in itself. The townspeople all knew Jesus as a carpenter or stonemason, which comes from the Greek word *tekton*, which means *chief builder*, and yet there were two significant obstacles. First, they were aware that Jesus lacked the formal training of a rabbi (although he did bring his disciples). Jesus did not go to seminary or any university, nor did he study under the great rabbis of the day. No credentials. Secondly, unsettling rumors that he was the prince of demons created a tension that hindered their acceptance of Jesus' true identity and authority. What they did not understand is that he was the Word of God in person Himself who was teaching things before unheard.

Along with his disciples, Jesus comes home, not to the place of his birth, but to the village where He grew up. We read to find that he can do no mighty deeds in his hometown. Is this not the son of the carpenter, Joseph? Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary? Jesus is amazed at their unbelief. This raises a powerful question, one that we should take time to consider: the relationship between faith and healing. The belief that failure to achieve a healing miracle demonstrates a failure of faith is quite common today, at least in some circles, but it is not biblical. The truth is that full-of-faith people get sick and die too. The Lord heals some, but not all, faithful people. For sure, a bit of mystery surrounds the relationship between faith and healing, and perhaps the best answer falls between two lines. First, unbelievers fail to make themselves available to God’s power, and second, God is less inclined to act in favor of unbelievers. This mystery, this wonder, should inspire us to contemplate the depth of God's ways, filling us with awe and wonder. Let’s pray.

O Lord, by Your mercy and grace and by Your Holy Spirit, we pray this morning for all who would have ears to hear that, in a sense, be transported to Nazareth to observe the homecoming of Your Son and that You would apply to our hearts the conviction that people of Jesus’ town did not have and did not feel, and that by no means would Jesus ever be a stumbling block to us. We pray that through our faith and prayers, we may find hope and understanding in the face of life's mysteries. We ask these things in His name. Amen.

I can only imagine what it was like for Jesus to return home to those familiar with him. I can, however, share my own experience of returning to my hometown and meeting the people I

grew up with. They often express disbelief that I have chosen the path of ministry. Sometimes, they are silent, and other times, they can't wait to say: "We knew you back when we met each other in school or ran around together, but how did you ever become a minister? I understand that feeling of unbelief. Who is this guy? Me? In contrast to Jesus, I am the legitimate son of Nancy. But when the townspeople of Nazareth ask the same question: Who is this guy? He's a carpenter, the illegitimate son of Mary. By the way, where is his father? We know his family, his brothers and sisters, and they were embarrassed as we are.

I remember a boxer whose name given at birth was Cassius Clay. Later, he changed his name to Muhammad Ali, and he used to provide outrageous poems in which he would predict the outcome of his subsequent victory and say, "I am the greatest." Because he bragged so much, journalists nicknamed him "The Louisville Lip." This is not a very good reflection of the town of Louisville, his hometown, which was before Muhammad Ali became the heavyweight champion of the world. Now, the whole city honors him, but there was a time when he was an absolute embarrassment to them. Hence, there is a reason why Jesus said, "A prophet is never without honor except in his own country, in his own family, and his own house."

Two times in today's scripture, we witness the word amazed in verses 2 and 6. Once seeing the mindset of the townspeople and once from the perspective of Jesus. They were amazed at his teaching, but the text does not tell us, the reader, what Jesus was teaching. As Jesus arrives, the text tells us that He could not do any miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And what do we see? Jesus was **AMAZED** at their lack of **FAITH!**

Jesus comes home and finds the hometown destitute on account of their unbelief. His family and his hometown were deprived of signs and wonders. We should look at the text in reference to us, for as I said last week, we might not understand the Bible, but the Bible understands us, so I have to ask: Is anyone here amazed at what you hear and yet destitute of belief? In the pattern of unbelief, the hardness of a person's heart means that people cannot find forgiveness for sins. Have you ever wondered what could ever amaze Jesus, the creator of the universe?

Only two times does the Bible say in the New Testament that **Jesus was amazed**. Once, in Mark's verses 5-6, it reads, "**He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.**" The second example is found in Luke 7:1-10. Listen as I read. "*When Jesus had finished saying all this to the people who were listening, he entered Capernaum. There, a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So, Jesus went with them. He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy of coming to you. But say the word and my servant will be healed, for I am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it."*

*When Jesus heard this, he was **amazed** at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, “I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.” Then, the men who had been sent returned to the house and found the servant well.*

In the Bible, we see that faith is critical. The author of *Hebrews 11:6* writes, “*And without faith, it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.*” Indeed, the entire chapter of Hebrews 11 clarifies how our relationship with God was established by the faith of the ancients long ago and continues only by our faith in God today.

We are surrounded in this world by people who want nothing whatsoever to do with Jesus. I don't know how many times I've heard people say, “I don't need Jesus.” I don't need your religion. I can't think of any more foolish statement a human being could ever make than to assess their circumstances and say: “I need this. I need that. I want this. I want that—but one thing I don't need is Jesus.” I say to you, there is nothing on this earth that you need more desperately than Jesus because if you don't have Jesus, you have no hope in this life or in the world to come. I'll repeat it: If you don't have Jesus, you have no hope. Frankly, my heart breaks.

Maybe you can help me answer this question: What is it about Jesus that offends people? What is it about God that offends people? I certainly know what it is about religion that offends people. My friends, the great danger is that God is offended by those of unbelief, and thus His Son, in His amazement, the one who suffered on the cross for the sins of all people, will be offended. All who trip over the humiliation and dishonor of Christ will, in the end, have God's offense turn on them. Friends, we should take notice and learn from these people. Let's pray.

Our Father and our God prevent us from ever being offended by our Lord. We should never distance ourselves from God's glory and ever be embarrassed by the radiance of His beauty. Preserve us, O Christ, as Your people and by Your Spirit. Amen.