

Jesus, the Hometown Hero?

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And so now we're going to dive in here.

So Mark chapter 6, I'm reading the first six and a half verses. So if you'd look there with me, Mark chapter 6, verse 1.

This is our Lord. Jesus went away from there and came to his hometown. And his disciples followed him. And on the Sabbath, he began to teach in the synagogue.

And many who heard him were astonished, saying, Where did this man get these things? And what is the wisdom given to him?

[1 : 12] How are such mighty works done by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?

And brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him.

Verses 4. Or verse 4. And Jesus said to them, A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.

And he could do no mighty work there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.

And he marveled because of their unbelief. It's the word of God that we get to give attention to this morning.

[2 : 13] You know, humor is a gift in the monotony of life. A good joke. I'm not going to tell one. But a good joke.

A funny story. But sometimes the best humor is unintentional. One of the things I regularly find humorous are the warning labels pasted all over the things we use every day.

For instance, have you ever noticed that a McDonald's cup of coffee includes warning, contents hot? Like, hmm, you don't say.

I mean, they fly in, the geniuses of the world, to figure this out, you know? Or have you ever noticed that most chainsaws include the warning, don't touch the wrong end of the chainsaw with this cryptic image of a hand reaching across a spinning chainsaw as if that's a really logical decision. Some hair dryers even include the warning, do not use while sleeping. Apparently, that became a problem.

[3 : 19] One of my favorites is the audio company, Jabra. They make Bluetooth headphones you might use running or something like that. They had a speakerphone entitled Drive and Talk with the curious warning, never operate your speakerphone while driving.

I want my money back, you know? I mean, maybe we should relabel it Talk, but some of the best illustrations and warnings are on heavy machinery.

I saw one on a New Holland skidster that said, avoid death. Now, that's one in bold caps. That gets your attention, you know? Like, enjoy a stubbed toe, no big deal.

Or avoid a stubbed toe, no big deal. But avoid death. Before unbuckling your seatbelt and leaving seat, lower arm to the ground, stop engine, lock, park, brake, and remove key. But the illustration's even better.

It's like the arm is coming down, this guy's diving out the front of the skid steer. Like, whoever did that? You know, in a world of seemingly pointless warnings, we come upon a passage with a startling warning for us.

[4 : 29] It details Jesus' return home. But rather than being welcomed as a hometown hero, he is questioned and opposed by the people who know him best, by the people who grew up with him.

It's a startling passage, if you think about it. Why would Mark include this passage? Certainly, it's not to polish our image of Jesus Christ. If Mark were looking to make Jesus look better to us, the details of how his hometown relatives and siblings rejected him is surely something he would cut. So why? I want to argue, this passage is preserved in Holy Scripture to function as a warning for people like us. People who go to church and know a lot about Jesus.

Scripture is filled with sober warnings. If you give attention to Scripture, it's filled with sober warnings like this. Hebrews 2, 1. We must pay careful attention to what we've heard, lest we drift away.

Hebrews 3, 14. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence to the end.

[5 : 42] Now I thought, once saved, always saved, right? Yes.

But Scripture includes these warnings to help us persevere. One scholar says it like this, I have argued that the warnings and admonitions of Scripture have a particular function.

By them, believers are warned against departing from Christ and the gospel. It's by means of taking these warnings seriously that the promise of salvation is secure.

So the warnings are evidence of grace. This morning, we want to give attention to these warnings, lest we fall away and never, and do not receive the full benefits of salvation.

And where we're going is, watch out. Do not despise the unbelievable salvation God has secured in Jesus. Watch out. Don't despise the unbelievable salvation God has secured in Jesus.

[6 : 47] So we're going to break this out in three points. The first one is the danger of familiarity. The danger of familiarity. After unveiling His glory, as we saw the past couple of weeks in these miracles around the sea, Jesus is calming the storm, casting out the demons and the demoniac, healing Jairus' daughter and the disease-ravaged woman, we can only imagine that Jesus would be welcomed home like a hero.

He's been turning the world upside down, and now He's back home for a few days. Let's all rush over, kill the fattened calf, and hang with Jesus Christ because of what He has done and what He is doing.

But that's not what He received. Immediately we see the danger of familiarity. Look with me in verses 1 and 2. He went away from there and came to His hometown, that is Nazareth, and His disciples followed.

On the Sabbath He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were astonished. And so that's not surprising. Every time Jesus went to a new place, He taught in the synagogue on the Sabbath, and people were routinely astonished, just like the folks in Capernaum.

In chapter 1 we saw, they were astonished at His teaching. He taught as one with authority. But they're not astonished here for the same reason. Look at how they continue.

[8 : 17] Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by His hand? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?

If you notice, they recognize His wisdom. They recognize His mighty works. But they're astonished, not because of His wisdom and mighty works, but because they could never come from their old friend Jesus.

They know Jesus. They've known Him for years. They grew up with Him in this same hometown. Nazareth is about 90 miles north of Jerusalem, on a hillside, with about 500 people on a good day. As you know, everybody knows everybody in a small town. We know where you stay at, and what you've been up to.

But their questions uncover the danger of familiarity. They begin with kind of curiosity. Where did this man, now notice, He's gone from our Lord to this man, in this passage, get these things.

[9 : 28] Must not have been from His birth. Must not have been from something resident in Him. He must have snatched them from somewhere. What is this wisdom given to Him?

So they begin with this curiosity. They continue with this surprise, like a negative surprise, astonishment in a not so good way. How do the mighty works? How are they done by Him?

They conclude with doubt. Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary? The doubt is obvious, and where these questions land. Is not this the carpenter?

Now, some people have that bumper sticker, my boss is a Jewish carpenter, right? Well, this is where it's from. The only place in Scripture that refers to Jesus, I mean, Matthew's parallel account, but the only place in Scripture that refers to Jesus as a carpenter.

So this is where we learn that Jesus is a small town woodworker, a noble profession for a Jew, but by no means impressive to the world. What they're saying is, isn't this the guy that's swung a hammer down the street?

[10 : 35] Isn't this the guy, like, that our mothers cradle us together? How can He teach with such wisdom? Then they continue, is not this the son of Mary?

Mary. It's interesting that, that, that Jesus is called the son of Mary here. In a patriarchal culture, you'd never be referred to by your mother. Some scholars say, each of the brothers, now, it's kind of cool that we know Jesus has brothers and sisters, from this verse too, right?

I think it is, you know, James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon, and his sisters, although unnamed. Some scholars would say, this is where, uh, uh, Jesus is called the son of Mary, because these children were Joseph's children by his first wife.

Now, that's guys that study names for a living. Ancient names. But whatever the overall effect is, the folks in Nazareth doubt Jesus because he's just a local boy.

He's nothing to get excited about. Certainly, he's no prophet. Their response is meant to stun us. The people who doubt Jesus are those most familiar with him.

[11 : 49] They say familiarity breeds contempt, right? The more you know someone, the more you begin to dislike them. I'm sure we've all had that experience. We've met somebody, a pastor, a boss, or a family member, and we've begun to expect them less and less.

As we hung out with them more and more, we've begun to expect to respect them less and less. Perhaps they're not respectable, but often it's the familiarity that gets in the way.

It has very little do with the person. In fact, the familiarity with family is one of the reasons it's so hard to witness to family. I was reading a book called Bring Them Home or something like that by Randy Newman, evangelist Randy Newman.

He tells about telling his friends that he was going to write, telling his evangelist friends that he was going to write a book on witnessing the family. And the friends suggested first five chapters be one, don't do it.

Chapter two, don't do it. Chapter three, don't do it. That means don't witness to them at all. Chapter four, pray for somebody else to do it. Chapter five, review chapters one, two, and three.

[13 : 02] You know, that gets it about right, doesn't it? How many of us have stumbled into conversations trying to witness to family? The difficulty of witnessing the family is our familiarity.

We know so much about them, had so many experiences with them that we assume we know exactly how they'll respond. We limit them. We corner them. We pigeonhole them, label them, and critically judge them.

Our problem is often not them, but our familiarity with them. The same thing's going on in Jesus' passage, in this passage right here.

The people most familiar with Jesus question him. Interestingly, in the gospel of Mark thus far, the people that identify Jesus right out are the demons.

You're the son of God. You're the holy one of God. Verse 34, or 134, he wouldn't let them talk because they knew him. Verse 311, you are the son of God. 5-7, what have you to do with me, Jesus, son of the most high God?

[14 : 03] And the humans, though, question him. So the demons identify him. The humans question him. What is this? A new teaching? Why does this man speak like that?

Chapter 2, he's blaspheming. Who then is this that even the wind and the seas obey him? Is not this the carpenter? The son of Mary?

First it's the people in the synagogue. Then it's the religious leaders. Now it's his own family. The people most familiar with Jesus Christ. The people who grew up with him, slept beside him, ate alongside him, worked with him, lived with him, are the very ones who question him.

How could this be? Now let that settle on you. We only know of two of his brothers that we think have become Christians, Judas and James, obviously.

Familiarity with Jesus Christ is an asset. Being raised in a Christian home is a real blessing. Being taught the truths of the gospel from a young age. But again and again in Mark, that which could be an asset is often a liability.

[15 : 14] Familiarity with Jesus Christ can be a type of vaccine. We get a little bit of it into our system and become immune to him. Become immune to really getting to know him and live for him.

That little bit may work for a while until it doesn't. Let us watch out for this familiarity that is so dangerous for our souls.

Point two, the cause of offense. The cause of offense. After familiarity gives way to doubt, the folks in Nazareth become offended at Jesus Christ.

Look down there in verse 3, the end of it. He says, and they took offense at him. And they took offense. They become offended. What begins in curiosity, surprise, and doubt turns into offense. Their doubt has become literally an obstacle between them and Jesus. Have you ever had somebody you've had an offense with? Unless you humble yourself and deal with the offense, you can hardly be in the same room with them.

[16:24] Because it's like this obstacle in between you and them. So I think the idea that Mark's trying to get to us is their doubt is no longer innocent. It's not curious questions anymore.

Their doubt has turned into disbelief and open opposition. Think about this. Why would familiarity turn into opposition? Wouldn't familiarity, you know, just the local guy down the street doing something crazy, just lead to writing him off?

Right? I just can't imagine. Guys come down the street, comes and tells you that Jesus is coming back next week at 7 p.m. on Thursday night. You just kind of write him out.

You write him off. Like that's just one more chalked up to the wacko. So why? It's not just their familiarity that bothers them.

It's the scandal of what Jesus is claiming to do. It's not just that they know Jesus is a carpenter from Nazareth. It's the fact that this carpenter from Nazareth is claiming to be God.

[17:28] This offense becomes a stumbling block. Now you probably know that word. Let me show you the same words taken up in 1 Peter 2. It says, For he says in Scripture, Behold, I'm laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious.

Whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling, right there, and a rock of offense.

What Jesus is saying is that his life, the reason all this is going on is that he came to draw many, but to drive others away.

He didn't necessarily come that way. The message of the gospel draws many, but drives others away. It attracts many, but repels others. Jesus Christ is a fork in the road to which many will follow, but others will turn away.

Why? Because his life and his death and resurrection are scandalous. One of the things we celebrate on July 4th, as citizens of this country, is the scandal of America.

[18:47] America. Now, I'm not like a loyal Brit, you know, underneath my chest or something like that. What I mean is, how did this ragtag group of colonies overturn British rule?

How did they join together and win independence from a king who assumed we were under his thumb? They could have taxation without representation. It was these ideals, right?

We know that about it. These ideals of individual liberty, civil and religious liberty. I was actually reading a book a couple months ago about a number of different things, but it went into the life of John Witherspoon.

Believe it or not, he is the only pastor that signed the Declaration of Independence. It's so interesting. He was raised in Scotland, came over here because of the ideals drew him.

He preached at his church in May of 1776, said this, I am satisfied that the confederacy, the group of the union of these colonies, that has not been the effect of pride, resentment, or sedition.

[19:55] I'm not doing something wrong, but of a deep and general conviction that our civil and religious liberties, and consequently in a great measure, the temporal and eternal happiness of all of us and our posterity, depended on the issue of individual liberty.

So he was caught up in this. That's what is behind this scandal of declaring freedom from your master. So too, Christianity is a scandal.

How could a Savior be born in Nazareth? Not in Jerusalem or Rome. Even Bethlehem, you remember? But you, O Bethlehem, small among Judah, from you shall come the ruler of the world.

How could the Messiah be born of a poor virgin woman? The scandal continues. How could the Almighty God be stripped of all power on the cross?

How could he who couldn't save himself save others? How could he die to save? How could his finest act be his substitutionary, or his individual and substitutionary death?

[21 : 07] How could he align himself with the poor, the weak, the guilty, and the outcasts? How could he build his kingdom on the margins of society, those whom everyone throws out?

How could he be born of a poor virgin woman? So Jesus continues matter-of-factly and says, The prophet's not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and his household. That's just a proverb. The prophet's not without honor. The idea is the prophet receives honor everywhere. But the shock of that proverb is who doesn't give him honor here, his hometown, his relatives, his household.

The people who are inside Jesus' family are often outside the family of God. Now let that sink in. Jesus is a stumbling block, and even those closest to him stumble over him. You know, we all live with this kind of unquenchable desire to be on the inside. If I was just in the know, if I would just end with the right people, then life would be perfect.

[22 : 17] I know that was true for me as a kid. You know, I wanted to be a part of the gang. Actually, as a young kid, I wanted to be a gangster. Who doesn't? Who doesn't want to be Al Capone or Vito Corleone?

I spent countless nights reading about gangsters. I remember in my stocking one year getting a biography on John Gotti, who's like a total crook. I don't know what my parents are thinking. Like, this guy's crazy. Dreaming about what it'd be like. You know, I imagine their power and promise. My very first school project on one of those old Apple computers with the game Oregon Trail, if you know, you know, was on the St. Valentine's Day massacre with Al Capone. Even now, I can't help but be fascinated. I might stumble into a monster movie. You know, in middle school, I wanted to be popular. I wanted to be liked. I would do almost anything to extract or to get and attract that attention and acceptance from people in high school.

It just got worse. I fell headlong. I was a part of a club, a social club. Nowadays, I mock frat boys, but I was a part of kind of a frat in high school.

[23 : 27] It was just kind of all about that. We had our exclusive T-shirt that made us stand out and look impressive. I assumed that being on the inside would make all the difference.

But what did I gain? Nothing. There's a similar shock here. Some of those we assume are on the inside are really out. And those we assume are on the outside are really inside.

Jesus' kingdom is upside down in so many ways. The only people that can get inside the family of God are those who embrace what looks like failure, what looks like foolishness, what looks like loss, indeed, what looks like death.

Martin Luther says it well when he says, everyone must duck his head and come into the joy of forgiveness only through the low door of humility. You've got to be a fool for Christ.

That doesn't mean put on some silly colors and run around screaming Jesus or something like that. It's that you've embraced the folly that this world is not where you're hoping for gain.

[24 : 38] This world is not what you're living for. And they tripped. Let us not. Point three, the reality of unbelief. The reality of unbelief.

After the folks of Nazareth stumble into offense, we see this astonishing reality of unbelief. Look in verse five. He could do no mighty work there except that he laid his hands on a few people, sick people, and healed them.

And he marveled because of their unbelief. Now that's kind of crazy, isn't it? What does it mean that Jesus could do no mighty work? It must not mean that Jesus could not do any mighty work.

It must not mean that Jesus' power was limited in some way as if he wanted to heal but could not. Nothing is impossible for God.

And verse five continues with that statement. He laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. You know, it's kind of, he could do no mighty work, but he did lay his hands on a few sick people and healed them. You know, kind of like talking out of both sides of your mouth, Mark. I think what it means, so it can't mean that, but I think what it means is that he would not do any mighty work without faith.

[25 : 51] He would not do any mighty work without faith. Jesus only heals those who respond in faith. The contrast between Jairus Jairus and his daughter and the disease-ravaged woman couldn't be more stark.

Remember, Jesus says to her, your faith has made you well. To Jairus, do not fear, only believe. So Jesus only heals those who respond in faith. Jesus refuses to put on a show as we Christians can be very good at doing.

He refuses to cheapen his miracles. He refuses to give away the substance of his ministry for more perceived power. He would have gained a larger crowd but he would not have gathered true followers of Jesus Christ.

So he marvels at their unbelief. We see the astonishing reality of unbelief. Unbelief cuts us, cuts someone completely off from Jesus Christ. Unbelief leaves someone completely outside all that he has accomplished in his life, death, and resurrection.

Unbelief is literally not faith. You know those words like, I'm not going to be able to think of one in the moment, but you know, you add an A at the beginning of a word and it gives you its opposite.

[27 : 07] There's probably a linguist that knows that but you know, I definitely can't think of one on the fly but literally that's a pistuo. So a faith, not faith. So that's what unbelief is, not faith.

Not faith. There's a new movement going on, I guess, outside of Christianity called deconversion. People are articulating their turn away from Christianity in terms of pursuing honesty and authenticity with who they are.

People are applauding them for their courage but we see right here what unbelief is. It's not courage, it's folly. It's not honesty, it's denial of what they know in their hearts.

There's just a couple things I want us to see right here in this passage. The first is unbelief is more personal than philosophical. Unbelief is more personal than philosophical. When we think of unbelief we think of like you know, a Socrates-like person pondering what caused this thing to spin into orbit or if God exists why do good people suffer or why do people die of hunger every day? They're just pondering these unanswerable questions but that's not the picture we get here. It's personal. It begins in offense.

[28 : 20] Most people don't discard Jesus because of philosophical arguments. They discard Jesus because of personal offenses. They discard them because sadly some churches failed them.

Now, one of the things I do like tell our new members is that we will fail you. I will fail you. I will not make it to the hospital as fast as you would like.

I may not make it at all. I may fail to call you back. So welcome aboard.

You know, I mean, how's that for a pep talk? Because it's a reality. It's a sad reality. I'm a sinner.

Everyone in this church, it's not just me that's going to fail you it's other people that are going to fail you.

that's how people stray from Christianity or a parent who is a Bible-thumping parent but not one that loves their children well.

[29 : 34] Kids raised with this question, how do these exist? you love God publicly, outwardly, and yet your actions seem to only lead me to conclude that you hate me.

you might be there. I'm sorry. But don't discard Jesus Christ because of a poor representative of Him.

That's where it comes. That makes sense. It's personal offenses. The other thing we've got to see about unbelief right here is unbelief is not due to inability but to refusal.

Unbelief is not due to inability but refusal. Did you catch that? That Jesus marveled at their unbelief. Now the demoniac or when the demoniac story went out through all the area everyone marveled at Jesus.

But here Jesus marvels at their unbelief. Jesus marvels because He's standing there offering salvation and they refuse. Jesus is in the flesh.

[30 : 48] You know, you would think if Jesus were in this meeting we would all be happening. Well, He is here by His Spirit. We think that's all it would take.

This verse helps us understand the nature of salvation. The problem with many in Nazareth is not that they were unable to believe. The problem is they refused to believe. They had a responsibility and they refused.

This is one of the most common misunderstandings of Reformed theology. Since God decides who will believe then our response to Him doesn't matter because He makes all those who decided to believe believe.

And all those who didn't decide to believe don't believe. And so you get yourself in a quandary but that doesn't align with this passage. Jesus doesn't marvel at the people that accepted His prior choice and the mystery of the way these things work out.

Jesus marvels at those who refuse Him to His face. The gospel demands a response and anyone who does not respond in faith will be judged.

[31 : 57] But everyone who does will be saved. watch out don't despise the salvation God has secured in Jesus.

So how do we heed the warning? Two thoughts. First is turn to Jesus in faith. Jesus came to Nazareth calling them to turn to Him in faith.

Jesus comes to us through the preaching of His word calling us to put our faith in Him. The loving kindness and goodness of God our Savior has appeared to Jesus Christ and is laid bare in this passage.

John Calvin says we must understand that as long as Christ remains outside of us and we are separated from Him all that He suffered and all that He has suffered and done for our salvation for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us.

As long as Jesus remains outside of us separated from us all He has done and all He has suffered is useless and of no value to us and so this passage is calling us to come inside as it were Jesus Christ to receive these benefits that are tied to Him like you can't have forgiveness you can't have reconciliation you can't have any of the benefits of peace with God or any of these things that are benefits of the gospel without coming to Jesus Christ and so I invite you to come He said come to me all you weary and heavy lading I will give you rest for my yoke is easy and my burden is light you find rest for your soul so you can come to Jesus Christ if you believe in Him that His death was not merely for Him but was so that these benefits might flow freely to you you will be saved so turn to Jesus in faith the second thing

[33 : 54] I say is keep turning to Jesus in faith now that's real creative you know keep turning in faith you know guard your faith at all cost guard it 1 Timothy 6 says fight the good fight of faith do whatever you must do to continually stir up your faith and by all means stop anything that distracts disturbs and destroys your faith keep pressing forward in faith Martin Luther you say that faith is a busy little thing faith is always busy preparing us for God faith is always busy getting us to believe in things not yet visible to live for things not yet seen to stake our lives on things not yet possible with human effort in our own mind A.W. Tozer says this and I'll post these quotes up tomorrow usually we have a screen for you to look at he says unbelief says some other time but not now some other place but not here some other people but not us faith says anything he did anywhere else he will do here anything he did any other time he's willing to do now anything he ever did for other people he's willing to do for us with our feet on the ground and our head cool not a wacko but with our heart ablaze with the love of

God we walk out in the fullness of spirit if we we will yield and obey God wants to work through you that's what faith that's a posture of faith just leaning forward constantly and if you live like this your life will be a scandal it won't make sense who wants to live a life that makes sense in this world have you ever heard the story of William Borden probably have a famous missionary he was born in a wealthy Chicago family his mother was saved for the preaching of the gospel and he too was saved as a teenager while attending church he went on to do what distinguished boys do he went to distinguished high school then to Yale back then then to Princeton Seminary which was the mother of all good orthodoxy he rejected though after that a life of ease in order to bring the gospel to the Muslims he gave away hundreds of thousands of dollars to missions then at age 25 he boarded a ship for China to serve as a missionary due to his passion to reach him he stopped in Egypt to learn Arabic while only there for four months he contacted spinal meningitis and died it's a tragedy afterwards his parents were given his Bible and they found the following when he renounced his fortune to go to the mission field he wrote no reserve no backup no slush fund no Dave Ramsey approved emergency fund when his father told him he would always have a job in the company and then his father later told him he would never let him work in the company again because of the way he was living he wrote no retreat anyone who puts his hand to the plow and turns back not worthy shortly before his death perhaps knowing his death was only days away he wrote no regret it's no surprise that in

Cairo Egypt his simple headstone reads apart from faith in Christ there's no explanation for life that's what they said to our Lord there's no explanation for this life may they say it of us may they say it no explanation for someone who would live like this give like this serve like this bend out their life to the lost like this let us pray father in heaven we cast your cast ourselves upon you we praise you and worship you we offer our lives to you promptly and sincerely we give everything to you we do want to be searched by this warning we want to be pressed forward to the upward call of God and Jesus

Christ we want to not consider what lies ahead or behind but press on forward to what lies ahead that we might be found in you not having a righteousness of our own that comes from the law but that which comes by faith that by any means possible whatever you might have for us whatever the Lord ordains we might gain the resurrection of the dead we lean on you we cry out to you come gird us up and keep us we pray in Jesus name amen amen let's stand together you've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens Tennessee for more information about Trinity Grace please visit us at trinitygraceathens.com B