

The Offense of Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Our sermon text today is Mark chapter 6, verses 1 through 13. That starts on page 789 in the Pew Bible. Mark 6, 1 through 13. Let me pray for us, and then I'll read.

Father, we have just prayed that all of our delight is in you. Lord, we ask that by your Spirit that would be more and more true.

And that as we come to your Word now, you would grant us by your Spirit the heart that delights in what you have to say to us. Help us to receive it, to believe it, to live it to your glory.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. All right, let me read Mark 6 for us. He, that is 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?

[1 : 09] What is the wisdom given to him? 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. 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. And he went about among the villages teaching, and he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two.

And he gave them authority over the unclean spirits. And he charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff, no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

And he said to them, Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. And if any place will not receive you, and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.

[2 : 18] So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them. So from the very beginning, the church has been a people on mission.

In Christ, God redeems a people for himself, that they might display his glory and take his saving good news to the ends of the earth.

A people on mission. And this means Christianity has always had a profound answer to one of the deepest human longings. The longing for purpose. Why am I here? What's my life for?

We all know, or at least we find out sooner or later, that living for things like pleasure or money or fame fall short. But if not those things, what then do we live for?

Is there a bigger story or a bigger purpose that can embrace and give deep meaning to our, well, most of the time, ordinary lives? Well, that's exactly what the church believes.

[3 : 25] That in Christ, we've been given a mission, a purpose, to make much of him and to be agents of his new creation in the world. To advance a kingdom of love, of righteousness, of peace, of forgiveness, of truth.

A truth that sets people free. And what we see here in the opening of Mark 6 are two interconnected episodes that have to do with mission.

Now, that's fairly obvious when we consider the second half of the passage, verses 6 through 13. There Jesus sends out the 12 apostles for the first time. Clearly, this is a passage about mission, even if many of the details are specific to that particular moment in salvation history.

But what does the first half of the passage have to do with mission? Verses 1 through 6, where Jesus is rejected in his hometown. Well, it's important to see that since chapter 3 of Mark's gospel, Jesus has been preparing the 12 for mission.

He called them in chapter 3, verse 14, so that they might be with him, and he might send them out to preach. So all this time in chapters 3 and 4 and 5, Jesus has been training them, preparing them, to be heralds of the in-breaking kingdom of God.

[4 : 38] And so Mark chapter 6, verses 1 through 6, is sort of like their last lesson before heading out for the first time.

And what does Jesus have for them? What does Jesus want them to learn? What does he want us to learn? Well, what he wants them and us to see is that his mission will often cause offense.

In other words, he's preparing them for the reality of rejection. Now think about it.

Why is this an important lesson? Since being chosen, the 12 apostles had been with Jesus. They had shared his experiences. They had heard his teaching. And on top of that, they had seen his power.

Power, as we saw in chapter 5 over the last couple of weeks. Power over demon possession.

Power over sickness. Power even over death. But imagine going directly from chapter 5 right to chapter 6, verse 7.

[5 : 41] In other words, imagine going directly from seeing Jesus' authority over all those things directly to being sent out. Imagine the expectations they would have had for their mission. Imagine how triumphalistic they would have been.

They might have thought nothing could stand in their way. They would have thought that being a follower of Jesus, being a part of his kingdom mission, was only about power. Only about victory. And not also about suffering. And so first, Jesus must also show them the offense that he brings and the reality of rejection.

So let's look a little more closely at our passage then and see why Jesus causes offense, how he responds, and then in light of that, how we can respond when we face rejection for Christ's sake.

So first, let's look at why Jesus causes such offense. Let me read again verses 1 through 3. Now, Jesus' hometown was Nazareth.

[7 : 08] Nazareth was a small village about 15 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. And archaeologists estimate that the population of Nazareth in Jesus' day was about 500 people at most.

So it was a very small town, even by first century standards. And Jesus returns home with his disciples following him. And when he teaches in the synagogue, their response is not the kind of beaming pride in their hometown hero, right?

You know, he's not like the kind of hometown pro athlete who comes home after winning the championship to his small hometown and they give a little parade in his honor. You know, out comes the one fire truck and out comes the one police car.

He's back! In fact, the sentiment is just the opposite. The people are astonished, Mark says, but not in a good way. Indeed, they are offended.

They could not think it possible that one who had lived among them so many years and whose brothers and sisters they knew could deserve to be followed as a public teacher.

[8 : 18] Their skepticism is most evident in verse 3. Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son? Now, the word carpenter there means something a little more broad than our word carpenter.

It means something like craftsman or workman. It was used of a broad range of kind of manual laborers, stonemasons, builders, not just woodworkers.

But you hear the cynicism in their voice, don't you? How are such mighty works done by his hands?

Aren't those just the hands of the carpenter? Now, we should mention that in Jewish society, there was nothing necessarily demeaning about manual labor, which was different, say, than

Greco-Roman culture that tended to look down on it.

But even if manual labor was more respected among the Jews than among the Gentiles, there is still a tinge of contempt in their voice. The contempt that says, you're rising above your station.

Who do you think you are? Do you really think you're better than the rest of us? Now, as an aside, isn't it wonderful that our Lord Jesus, the eternal Son of God, spent the first 30 years of his life as a tradesman, as a manual worker, as a carpenter, as a stonemason?

[9 : 44] And doesn't that completely deconstruct the sort of worldly values we place on different professions and workplaces that some are sort of inherently better or more valuable than others?

Jesus blessed our ordinary life and filled it with dignity. One writer put it this way. He said, it's no disgrace to work with our hands and earn our bread by our own labor.

The thought of the carpenter shop at Nazareth should cast down the high thoughts of all who make an idol of riches. It cannot be dishonorable to occupy the same position as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Now, for the people that day in the synagogue, why were they offended at Jesus? Jesus, the word Mark uses for offense means a stumbling block. What is it they were tripping over? What was the great obstruction to faith in Jesus?

Well, on the one hand, it was their familiarity, right? Their familiarity. They had watched him grow up. They knew every one of his living relatives. Look, there are his brothers. There are his sisters. And I would imagine in a town of 500, everybody knew everything about everybody else, right?

[10 : 54] There probably weren't many secrets in a town that small. They could not, they would not believe that one whose face they knew so well, who lived so long eating and drinking and dressing like one of them had any right to claim their attention.

Their long proximity to Jesus, what they thought they knew about him, that supposed familiarity with him, was the very thing that made them turn away. Of course, the same thing is true today, isn't it? A lot of people think they know what Christianity is all about. And even if they didn't grow up going to church, they've grown up in a post-Christian culture with vestiges of Christianity still sort of hanging on, empty though they may be.

And that familiarity so easily breeds contempt, as we say. But this might be even more of a danger for those inside the church than those outside. You know, if you've grown up in the church, hearing the Bible read, hearing the gospel preached, hearing God praised, hearing prayers being made, it's easy for it all to become just a familiar thing.

Maybe it is a part of your life. Maybe you'd say it's an important part of your life. But Jesus Christ is far from being the Lord of your life. And without knowing it, perhaps your repeated exposure to the gospel has actually made you immune to the very real grip and power of it.

[12 : 27] It's kind of like being exposed to a virus a little bit at a time for a long period of time. And your immune system eventually builds up a resistance to it. And eventually, you're kind of inoculated to it. It has no power over you.

Has the reality of Jesus Christ, has the wonder of the gospel, has the power of the forgiveness of sins and of reconciliation with a holy God become like that to you?

Something you're just inoculated to. If so, pray to God, our merciful God.

Ask Him to remove the callousness of your heart, to make Christ unfamiliar to you so that you might really come to genuine saving faith in Him. But you know, it wasn't just familiarity that caused the offense.

It was also the claim that Jesus was making. In the rest of Mark's gospel, we know when we see Jesus teaching in the synagogue that He did so with authority. He was claiming to be the one who could rightly teach the way of Israel's God.

[13 : 34] The one to rightly interpret Israel's scriptures. He wasn't like the other rabbis or religious scholars. He didn't quote other authorities or teachers or traditions to support or prove His point.

In fact, He would often just simply say, truly, truly, I say to you. But you know, even more than that, Jesus was claiming to be the one to usher in God's kingdom.

Now we know from Luke's gospel, actually, what passage Jesus read from that day. It was Isaiah 61. What Jesus read was this, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because He has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. And then He said to all those sitting there, today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.

This is the offense of Jesus. He claims to be the one who can open your blind eyes and set at liberty your guilty conscience.

[14 : 47] But that's just it, isn't it? We don't want to be told that we're blind and guilty, let alone be told that some manual laborer from Nazareth is the one to fix the problem, the problem we don't even think we have.

And that's why Jesus is still offensive today and why He will always be. Because He's making a claim that goes as deep as our very self, our very identity.

And He's making a claim on our very way of viewing ourselves and the world and the God who made it. And that's why the mission of the apostles that He sends out was offensive too.

Notice that He doesn't tell them you're going to be received everywhere. He says some of them are going to reject you. Why? Because they went out everywhere saying that people should repent.

And that word repent doesn't just mean feeling sorry for particular sins.

Everybody does that, right? You don't have to feel, you don't have to be a Christian to feel sorry for doing wrong things from time to time. No, repentance, what repentance really means is not just that, but changing your whole outlook.

[16:06] That your whole way of viewing yourself and the world has Jesus Christ in the center as Lord. That He really defines what's right and wrong, what's beautiful, what's true.

He's the fountainhead of it all. Repentance is changing your whole worldview to put Christ in the center. Now, I'm guessing that if you're here and you're not a Christian, that idea sounds pretty impossible, right?

Why put Jesus at the center of everything? And let me just say, if that's you, almost everyone else in this room who is a Christian at one point felt exactly the same way as you.

In many ways, we all start out like the folks in Jesus' hometown. So don't feel like you can't stick around here at Trinity and ask questions and be honest.

But you know, here's what's fascinating. Historically, we know from passages like this and many others in the Gospels that Jesus' immediate family pretty much all rejected Him during His earthly ministry.

[17:22] James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are some of the brothers listed here and there's mention of sisters too. By the way, this is a different Judas than Judas Iscariot. This Judas is later in the New Testament called just Jude.

Now, you have to imagine that there was probably nothing that would convince someone to believe that their sibling was the Messiah, right? I mean, if your older brother came home from college, sat down at dinner and said, I've come to set the captives free and open the eyes of the blind, you wouldn't sell everything and become His disciple, right?

But here's the thing. Eventually, there was something that convinced them. When we study the historical records of the earliest days of the church after Jesus is crucified and killed, no less, who's there among the leaders of the earliest Christian movement?

Who is there selling everything and proclaiming that the crucified Jesus is Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord? Who's there among the leaders? It's James, the Lord's brother, and Jude.

Something happened that changed the most cynical and skeptical minds. What would it take for you to believe that your brother was the Son of God?

[18:47] Well, we think, you know, people do lots of irrational things for money and power and fame, right? But that's not what they got for believing.

They got poverty, extreme social marginalization, and death. So what was it? What could take the most skeptical and cynical person and make them believe?

The answer the earliest Christians gave, the answer that James and Jude themselves gave, is the resurrection.

Jesus Christ was crucified, died, and was buried, and on the third day he rose again. And he appeared to Peter, then to the twelve, then he appeared to more than 500 at one time, then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Jesus claimed to be the one to heal our blindness and to liberate us from guilt. And how did he do it? Not through teaching some path for spiritual betterment, but by accomplishing something on our behalf.

[19:59] To rescue us from death, he himself died and rose again to break death's power. To deliver us from guilt, he suffered under the penalty of our guilt, and then rose again to pronounce us righteous.

That's why his claim to be our Lord isn't the selfish demand of a divine despot, but it's the irresistible call of divine love.

the sort of call that makes you want to surrender your whole life to it. The sort of call that makes you want to view your whole world anew.

In other words, it's the sort of call that leads you to joyfully repent and put the risen Lord Jesus at the center of everything. Now, if you are a Christian, the idea that Jesus calls the apostles here to share in his offense, in his rejection, probably makes you a little nervous because it means he's calling us today to do the same.

But let's look quickly at how Jesus responds. Pick up again in verses 4-6. And Jesus said to them, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.

[21 : 28] 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. I think the first thing to notice here is that Jesus, he doesn't take massive offense in return.

We might even say he doesn't take it personally. He has a deeper understanding of his own identity that allows him to be rejected without rejecting in return.

Notice he says, a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown. Jesus knew that because of who he was, and certainly he was even greater than a prophet, but he knew that because of who he was, rejection in his hometown would not necessarily be surprising.

Are you and I willing to do the same, to face rejection with this same composure, to not take it personally, to expect that because of who Jesus is there will inevitably be some offense, and so not to respond with anger or offense in return.

The second thing to notice is that Jesus doesn't just refuse to be offended in return. He doesn't just refrain from kind of rejecting them in return. He actually responds with compassion. You know, Jesus could have stormed out of Nazareth as soon as the synagogue service was over.

[22 : 51] Right? Stupid hometown idiots. I'm out of here. Right? No. He doesn't storm out as soon as the service is over.

Apparently, he stayed long enough to heal a few sick people even when, because of their unbelief, he wasn't able to do what Mark calls a mighty work.

work. In other words, Jesus knew, Jesus knew that he wasn't going to do anything amazing there. He wasn't going to do anything that would draw a crowd or amaze the onlookers.

No one was going to post a reel of what Jesus did in Nazareth that day. Right? He wasn't going to get a lot of new followers and build his brand. But he stayed.

He stayed anyway. And he healed the few that he could. Now, it's interesting to ponder, isn't it, in what sense Jesus was unable to perform a mighty work in Nazareth?

[23 : 55] Did human unbelief literally prevent Jesus from healing that day? If Jesus is God, couldn't he have just overridden their unbelief and healed them anyway? Well, Mark obviously doesn't delve into these questions here.

Theologically speaking, certainly Jesus is able to heal and therefore he was, we might say, choosing not to. But Mark's kind of narrative accent falls more on the humanity of Jesus here and on the gravity and tragedy of human unbelief and hardness of heart.

Their unbelief and their hardness of heart was so grave and so serious and such a problem that it just put a great hedge between them and the deep blessing that Jesus could bring.

And in the face of such unbelief, Jesus marvels, Mark says. James Edwards puts it this way in his quite excellent commentary on the book of Mark.

He says, what amazes God about humanity is not its sinfulness and propensity for evil, but its hardness of heart and unwillingness to believe in him.

[25 : 13] That is the greatest problem in the world. And so, Jesus' response to rejection is not contempt and rejection in return, but compassion, even amazement that they would fail to believe.

Now, as we consider how Jesus responded, we start to recognize that this isn't always how we respond, is it? Because we certainly face rejection today as well, don't we? You know, just like the first century, Jesus is still offensive today.

The human heart does not want to admit that it needs a Savior and the human heart certainly would prefer to be its own Lord. And so, the claim of Jesus will always offend. So, how do we respond when because of Christ's sake we too face rejection?

Well, of course, like Jesus, we don't take offense in return. We don't take it personally. After all, it's not really us, it's Christ. And after all, didn't you and I think the same thing before we came to faith? That this was all crazy and offensive. Why would we expect anything different from our friends and our coworkers, right? And, of course, we continue to respond with compassion.

[26 : 26] Jesus didn't stop loving his hometown. His heart was still soft, still amazed at their unbelief. And so, we keep a soft heart as well. Now, you might be noticing that Jesus told the twelve to shake the dust from their feet when a village refused to receive them.

And you might think, well, that doesn't sound too soft hearted, right? But we have to remember that the initial mission of the twelve was aimed at whom? At religious Jewish villages, right?

And in that time, shaking the dust from your feet was something that a pious Jew did when they left a Gentile area. And so, during this preliminary mission, if there was any place that thought they didn't need Jesus' message to be faithful to Israel's God, then this act by the apostles was communicating to them that they were actually responding not like faithful Jews but just like the unbelieving Gentiles.

It was saying to them that their religion, their tradition, their family heritage, as great as all those things were, were not going to save them. Only Jesus and his kingdom could.

And in our context, of course, there may and will come times when we need to be bold and wise to speak clearly about the necessity of Jesus for salvation. And in moments like those, compassion and a soft heart are even more critical.

[28 : 00] Lest our hearts begin to believe that it's anything other than sheer grace that has opened our eyes to see the beauty and necessity and sufficiency of Christ.

So we don't respond in kind, we don't take it personally, and we continue to have a heart of compassion towards those who may even be rejecting us. but we have to go even deeper.

The question isn't just how do we respond when we experience rejection for Christ's sake. At a deeper level, we need to ask, how can we overcome the fear of rejection that keeps us from publicly identifying with Christ in the first place?

On Monday, when your coworkers or your classmates ask how your weekend was, are we willing to say, you know, I went to church and it was really encouraging.

The sermon was a bit long and I couldn't quite follow his outline, but overall, I'm really glad I went. That's the first step of mission, you know.

[29 : 14] just making Christ known through your everyday life, identifying as a believer, making it normal to be identified with Jesus.

You know, the first step of mission is not sitting someone down and walking them through the four spiritual laws in one sitting, right? It's just letting the aroma of Christ be known around you, being able to publicly identify with Christ where you are.

But of course, even that step is difficult, right? We know that even that step can and does cause offense. Even that first step of mission can bring on the reality of rejection.

So what do we do? Well, there's actually one more thread that ties the two halves of our passage together. And it's found in verses 8 and 9, believe it or not.

In verses 8 and 9, Mark writes, Jesus charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff no bread, no bag, no money in their belts, but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

[30 : 21] Now on the surface, it seems like Jesus is just telling the apostles to travel light on this short mission. Travel light so you don't depend on your own resources but rather depend on God to provide.

And of course, that's very true. But you know, there's actually an Old Testament illusion here. What Jesus tells the twelve to take and wear on their mission is in fact identical to the belongings God instructs the Israelites to take on their flight from Egypt.

Belt, sandals, staff in hand. In other words, Jesus tells the apostles to go out wearing Exodus apparel.

Why? Well, because their mission is announcing something as foundational and as revelatory as the Exodus from Egypt, yes. But what was the event of the Exodus all about?

Well, God was liberating his people from 400 years in slavery and finally at long last bringing them home.

[31 : 39] he was calling the Israelites to leave what was at that point familiar for them. They were leaving what for a long time they might have called home and being brought out and taken to their real home and their true home, the home God had prepared for them.

Think with me. What makes us so afraid of rejection? Of course, nobody enjoys it, but where does the fear come from?

Isn't it the fear that we'll lose the security, the safety, the welcome, the belonging that whether we like to admit it or not, our hearts really need?

In other words, the human heart longs for home, a place of belonging, a place of acceptance. As Robert Frost said, home is the place where when you have to go there, they have to take you in. And the fear of rejection rises because we know that that sense of belonging in home will be threatened. What if my co-workers reject me? What if my friends reject me?

[32 : 56] What if my sports team rejects me? What if my roommates reject me? Where will I belong? Where's home? But here's the good news.

The proclamation of the gospel, the good news of what Jesus has done, is the message that God has always had our home in mind. He created us in a garden home to live and to flourish. And when sin destroyed it, he laid a plan that would stretch for thousands of years to bring us back again. And the exodus from Egypt was a picture, a foretaste, right? A people far from home, languishing, but liberated and brought finally to a permanent home, their new garden in the promised land.

But even a greater liberation was coming, a greater exodus, a greater home, the place our hearts were always made for, the new creation where God dwells in fullness.

And what is it that would win, that would win this greater liberation? What is it that would launch us out on this new exodus to our greater and our true home?

[34 : 12] Look at Mark 6. The Son of God is rejected. He loses his home so that you and I can gain ours. And Jesus' loss will be even greater on the cross when he cries out in Mark's gospel, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

On the cross, Jesus is losing his eternal home. He's facing cosmic rejection in a way that we cannot even fathom.

He's losing his home for you. So an even greater exodus can begin. So an even better home can be opened wide.

And in this home, there's no more condemnation and there's no more performing and there's no more pretending and there's no more rejection.

rejection. This isn't the home that when you have to go there, they have to take you in, right? This is the home where the God who made you is glad to take you in because you're his beloved, purchased by his own son, sealed with his own spirit, kept for eternity.

[35 : 29] God and that's how you and I can face the everyday fear of rejection, the fear of losing our belonging, losing our home. We see that Jesus lost his home for us so that we could have an eternal home that surpasses all the rest.

And when the reality and the security of our true home in Christ becomes more and more real to our hearts, then the more and more will become a people of mission.

Our lives will be dressed in exodus apparel, living in that unencumbered freedom of Christ, taking this journey together as the church, knowing that our home is secure.

and when the Lord Jesus returns, that home will one day cover the earth like the waters cover the sea. Let's pray together.

Lord Jesus, you said, blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake when others revile you and reject you.

[36 : 48] Then you are blessed. Oh Lord, help us to embrace that blessing for your sake with the deep peace and confidence you give, knowing that you love us and you've walked this road before us.

In our mission, Lord Jesus, make us compassionate, courageous, and wise. We ask this in Jesus' name, Father.

Amen. Amen.