

“You Win Some . . .”

Mark 6:1-6

¹He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²And 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? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?” ³Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” ⁵And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching. (ESV)

One of the small pleasures I get out of life is how easily people are surprised when they find out that I’m a pastor. For some reason, no matter where I go, people are always surprised. Probably about a month or so ago, one of the guys in the neighborhood was walking his huge dog. As he walks it off-leash the dog always comes in our yard and does his business. It bothers me. One day I thought, “I’m going to go out and catch this guy.” As I went out to talk to this guy as he was walking the dog off-leash, the dog came charging at me. As you know, I watch “The Dog Whisperer” so that was no problem. The dog came barreling at me and I went “Psssssst” and the dog just cowered. But what’s interesting is that apparently the guy thought I was going to hurt his dog. That’s how powerful that is – Psssssst. He came running at me and unloaded a list of obscenities like I’ve not heard for twenty years. He kept going and going and going and going. As you can imagine if you saw the movie “Sherlock Holmes” (the new version), as he was doing this he was poking his finger in my chest I was running through various scenarios in my head. Then the final scenario I landed upon made me laugh, which of course made him more frustrated. “What are you laughing at? You don’t know who you’re dealing with.” That’s what made me laugh, because no matter how hard-hearted you are, no matter how uncouth you are, very few people would want to unload a list of obscenities like this guy did to “Tom Allen, Minister.” I’ve lived for those moments.

It gets better. The further back you go and the closer to home you get the more interesting it becomes. A while ago my girls and I were watching TV and I saw a guy on an Army Reserve commercial. I said, “I know that guy! We were in a Ranger battalion together.” Of course my girls said, “Uh, uh.” They said, “Facebook him.” I Facebooked him and what do you know, within a day or two he Facebooked back and we were all of a sudden friends on Facebook. Through him my old assistant gunner found me and he and I were chatting one day. He said, “Aw, it’s so good to be back in contact with you.” I chatted back, “Hey, what are you doing now?” He said, “I’m an engineer in South Carolina. What are you doing?” “I’m a preacher.” Crickets. [No response.] “Are you there?” Then his next line was the most funny, at least to me. He said, “You always were encouraging.” I could tell stories like that all day long, but I’m here this morning to talk about Jesus, not me.

The point is, Jesus today experiences that, but He experiences it in an even deeper level. Jesus goes home today. Over the past month or so we’ve looked at Jesus basically being on top of the world. Here you see Jesus Who shows Himself to have authority over nature – He calms the storm by just saying, “Peace. Be still.” Then He shows Himself able to cast out a legion or an army of demons from one guy. Psssst, and it’s done. Last week we looked at Jesus exercising His authority over illness and uncleanness and sin with this woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. Then after that He raised a little girl from the dead. So here’s a guy with authority, and you notice the title of the sermon says, “You win some . . .” Of course the back part of that should say, “And you lose some.” So here’s Jesus on top of the world, and where does He need to go to fail, or at least where does He go for people to fail in their unbelief. Well, He goes where everyone goes, He goes home, to His hometown.

For the sake of time this morning we really only have time to look at two things. We’re going to look at the amazement of the crowd, but we’re also going to look at the amazement of Jesus. This is one of two places in the whole New Testament where you hear that Jesus was amazed, or Jesus marveled. One is at the faith of the centurion, and here He marvels or is amazed at people’s unbelief. We’re going to work through this verse by verse. The first thing we’re going to look at is the amazement of the crowd, and ultimately we’re going to look at their skepticism and unbelief and the root of their unbelief. Notice what it says in the first verse there.

¹He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ²And 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? . . . (ESV)

On the surface those first few questions seemed valid. “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him, and how are such mighty works done by his hands?” Those are valid questions assuming that you’re asking them with the right motives. Last week when we left Jesus He was in Capernaum. He grew up in Nazareth. He started His ministry in Capernaum, and now He’s going home. Nazareth by all accounts was a very small town. Outside of the New Testament

only one other Ancient Near Eastern writer actually mentions Nazareth. It's a guy named Julius Africanus. He just mentions it off-handedly, and most archeologists, depending on who you read, say between 500 and 1,000 people lived in Nazareth. You can understand people's surprise when Jesus came home because in a small town everyone knows everyone's business. Jesus was a carpenter; really the word there is "tekton." The word "tekton" most of the time means "woodworker." A lot of times it will mean "stonemason," and sometimes it just means "handyman." The reason that we think Jesus was a carpenter is because in the first century Justin Martyr actually wrote a piece about the yokes and the ox plows that Jesus had made. So, either way, he was a handyman and in a small town a carpenter probably had to do lots of different stuff. People knew Who He was; they had to have known Who He was.

He didn't go to college. He went to tech school under his dad. He didn't have a degree. He certainly didn't have a Masters. He certainly didn't have a PhD. In other words, He hadn't trained under a rabbi. In the Ancient Near East, much like today, if you hadn't trained under a rabbi, people didn't think you had anything to say. It's just like today, depending on who the rabbi was, that's the amount of credibility they would give you. It's much like today, but it always amazes me how much weight we put behind Master's degrees and PhD degrees, but it's just a degree, because a lot of what people say is worthless at the end of the day. Yet, if they don't have it, we won't talk to them.

They saw Him leave as a carpenter, but they didn't know why He was leaving. Now as He comes back into town He actually has a retinue of followers. That would raise questions in people's minds. "Who is this guy? We thought we knew Him." At some level the problem with Jesus being in His hometown is not because people knew Him, it's because people didn't know Him. We say, "The reason you have trouble in your own hometown is because people know you well. They know all the things you did when you were a kid and they have trouble believing you now." But if you think about it they had to know all the things Jesus did as a kid as well. Somehow they still didn't get it. They still didn't know Who He was. That's why they asked these questions. Let me read the questions again.

2 . . . "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?"

Did you notice the questions? They're not questioning whether He has great wisdom. They're not questioning whether He did mighty works. They're questioning how He did them. That question has been asked of Jesus before, by the religious leaders back in chapter 4. They actually didn't ask the question, they just made an accusation. They said, "There are only two places this miraculous power could come from. It either comes from God or Satan, and we say that it comes from Satan." That's when Jesus said, "Can Satan cast out demons by his own name?" And, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." So it has to be God. And now in His own hometown the same question is being asked. They're asking the question not because they know Him but because they really don't know Him, or they think they know Him. Isn't that one of the frustrating things when you go back home and your friends and your neighbors don't really know you? Especially for me, I became a Christian right before I left home, and then when I come back everyone thinks you're one way but really you're a different way. It's because they don't know you.

They really didn't understand. They'd only heard rumors about Jesus but they didn't know His person. So now they have with this dilemma. What were they going to do? It looks like skepticism. Instead of saying, "Tell us more," they immediately tried to write Him off. There are two kinds of skeptics. There are honest skeptics and dishonest skeptics. The dishonest skeptic is not looking for the truth. The honest skeptic is looking for the truth. I remember when I was in seminary, R. C. Sproul was one of my teachers and there were a lot of things that got him upset, to be honest with you. One of them was skeptics. It wasn't that he didn't like answering questions, in fact he loved answering questions and doing apologetics. But he called skeptics "academic parasites." Because instead of seeking the truth they were seeking to tear down. Anyone can tear down something. He would say, "It takes a man" (or "It takes a woman" I would say as well) "to seek the truth." If you're going to ask questions about Jesus, are you really willing to get the answer that He's going to give you? In fact, every skeptic that I've known who literally went to seek out the truth about Jesus ultimately ended up becoming a Christian. Skeptics who didn't want to know the truth didn't become Christians. Surprise, surprise. But the question is, "Is it true?" The root of skepticism ultimately is unbelief, and the root of unbelief ultimately is fear or pride. But fear and pride are actually two sides of the same coin. I'll talk about that in a second. Notice how they begin immediately when they don't get the answers (we assume). They start to disparage Him in verse 3.

3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. (ESV)

Instead of waiting for the answer to the first three questions they begin to ask other questions. The purpose of the questions literally is to disparage Jesus. "Is this not the carpenter?" In other words, "He's not a rabbi, He's not been to the right schools, He's not had the right education. So how in the world could He be saying these things the way He's saying them?"

Now mind you, He is saying them and they're hearing Him saying them, but they're saying, "It just couldn't be true if it's coming from the mouth of a carpenter." Then they say, "Is this not the son of Mary?" That's a slap in the face. In the Ancient Near East even if the father was dead you would never refer to a son as the son of his mother. Joseph at this point probably wasn't dead. If you look at John chapter 6 they say, "Isn't this the son of Joseph?" So why did they say, "Isn't this the son of Mary?" Well, the implication there is that Jesus is illegitimate and that Joseph really isn't His father, which on one hand we know He really isn't, but that's because God is His father. On the other hand, Joseph is His father as far as the world knew and as far as the earth knew. Yet, they're disparaging Him. If Joseph really isn't His father and if He's really illegitimate, then that gives us the reason to write off everything else, they say. They said, "Don't we know His brothers, James and Joses and all these guys, and His sisters here with us?" They're looking for every angle they can to not believe in Jesus. The question is, "Why?" The answer is that unbelief really has two roots, and they're both different sides of the same coin. One side is fear and the other side is pride. They're afraid.

What if what Jesus is saying is true? If you're not a Christian here today, what if what Jesus says is true? When He teaches and says that, "I am God come in the flesh and I have come to die for your sins and I rose again so you can have a new life." If what He says is true, that changes everything for you. If Jesus is right, that means you're wrong. If what Jesus says is true, that means what you believe is not true, necessarily. So many of us don't become Christians because we're afraid it's going to change everything, and you're right, it will. The gospel says you should consider the cost. But also it's pride because who wants to admit that the carpenter that used to work for you is now God. Think about how hard that would be, honestly. The carpenter that used to work for you now says He's The Messiah. The carpenter that put up the windows in your house is now coming and saying, "Unless you believe in me you will not have eternal life." Those would be hard words, especially if you knew Him or thought you knew Him. But a lot of it comes down to pride. Are you willing to give up your pride so that Jesus might have His way? Jesus didn't meet their expectations. They were expecting a royal king, someone to come in and release them from the oppressors, and Jesus is just a carpenter. What they didn't realize though, they didn't need a king to come in all His regalia. What they needed was a carpenter who would come and deliver them from their sins, and that's exactly what Jesus offered them. I think one of the most interesting lines in the New Testament is in verse 5 here.

⁵ *And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.* ⁶ *And he marveled because of their unbelief. . . (ESV)*

Notice it says that He marveled because of their unbelief, not at their unbelief. He marveled at the root cause of their unbelief. They couldn't argue with the fact that He had done mighty works, they couldn't argue with the fact that His teaching had authority. The only thing that kept them from believing was either their pride or their fear, and that was amazing apparently to Jesus.

It says, "He could do no mighty work there." Now, why is that? Jesus' works were tied to faith and Jesus' works were tied to actually witnessing this message of the kingdom of God being at hand. The reason skeptics (at least of Christianity) don't often see these things is because they don't have faith. Why would Jesus do something just to please you? Augustine said, "You have to believe in order to see it. It's not seeing in order to believe." The question is, "Are you going to deal honestly with the truth?"

When I was a drug rep at Lilly, I sold the best medicine in the world for schizophrenia, and every now and then a case report would come out, one case report where a doctor would write, "I had something bad happen." Of course doctors would write, "I can't write that medicine anymore." As soon as they would say that I'd give them the Bigfoot treatment. I'd have a lunch together and I'd say, "Okay, first thing at this lunch I want to ask you. How many people believe in Bigfoot?" I do. Usually one person would put their hand up. But most people wouldn't, partly because they were afraid to admit that, because people would come up to me afterward and say, "Well, I saw him." They just didn't want to be ostracized. I'd say, "How come you don't believe in Bigfoot?" They'd say, "I won't believe it until I see it." I'd say, "But there's tens of thousands of case reports going all the way back to Leif Erickson. The Vikings recorded in their journal sightings of Bigfoot. They called him 'Big Hairy Man' but he was the same guy. Yet you won't believe in it." They'd say, "I won't believe it until I see it." I'd say, "So you won't believe ten thousand case reports about sightings of Bigfoot?" They'd say, "Nope." I'd say, "But you'll believe one case report about my medicine?" Crickets, right? [No response.] Really you're not looking for evidence, you're looking for an excuse not to believe. You're looking for an excuse not to use my medicine.

It's the same thing. When you look at Jesus are you looking for excuses to believe or are you looking for excuses not to believe? If you look at the church and say, "The church is flawed therefore I don't have to believe." Do you look at things in the past and maybe have been wronged in the name of religion and say, "Religion is bad and therefore I don't have to believe." I would encourage you if you are not a Christian to look to Jesus and ask Him to tell you the truth. Ask Him, "What is the truth." If you are a Christian I'd ask you this question, "Why don't more great things happen in your life? Why don't more encouraging things happen in your life?"

I made the mistake of reading Charles Spurgeon's sermon on this passage. The whole sermon was basically an exhaustive account of the different ways that people who say they believe, don't believe. We say we believe that Jesus has saved us from our sins and yet we still worry about whether or not we're forgiven. We say that we believe that Jesus will finish the job yet we lay awake at night wondering if He's going to finish the job. In fact He said, "Our faith is a theory and our doubts are facts." He said it needs to be just the opposite. You need to doubt your doubts. Is your faith a fact when Jesus says, "I'll never fail you or forsake you," do you believe that? When Jesus says, "Cast all your anxiety upon Me because I care for you," do you cast it on Him because you know He cares for you or do you keep it to yourself out of fear? It's the same root. I believe we don't see more things happen in our church and in most churches as I read this simply because we lack faith. I'm not a "health and wealth" person. On the other hand, Jesus requires faith if He's going to work. He's not just going to work and then we're going to believe. He says, "Trust me in this." The question is, "Will you?" Think about that.