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 Title: The Sin of Unbelief  
 Text: Mark 6:1-6 (Gospel Parallels – Matt. 13:35-38; Luke 4:16-30)  
 Theme: The place of faith in the purpose of God.

**Introduction:**

Our focus geographically has been around the Sea of Galilee. Now our attention is turned to the city of His upbringing, Nazareth.

“When Jesus came to Nazareth . . . He came attended by his disciples. That is to say he came as a Rabi. The Rabbis moved about the country accompanied by their little circle of disciples, and it was as a teacher, with his disciples, that Jesus came.” (William Barclay, *Mark*, 138).

The ideas of faith and the growing opposition faced by Jesus are continued in the story of the rejection of Jesus in His home town.

Nazareth is not mentioned in the OT. It is, however, the home of Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:39). Jesus’ association with this village made him known as “Jesus of Nazareth” (Mk. 1:9, 24; Luke 18:37; 24:19). This statement made by Nathanel in John 1:46, 47 suggest that the people of Nazareth had a bad name among their neighbors for irreligion or some laxity of morals (Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 779).

This is perhaps the last visit that Jesus pays to Nazareth. It is as if Jesus stands to knock no longer at the door of opportunity.

The narrative parallels closely with the idea in Mark 1:21-28 yet the outcome swerves unexpectedly toward a negative conclusion.

**THE BIG PICTURE:**

Putting the pieces together, we see Jesus with authority over demons (5:1-20), death (5:21-24, 35-43), and disease (5:25-34). Now in chapter six, Mark gives us a panoramic view of a variety of events.

- **The Sin of Unbelief (vv 1-6)**
- The Sending of the Twelve (vv. 7-13, 30-32)
- The Slaying of John the Baptist (vv. 14-29)
- The Supplying of food for the 5000 (vv. 33-45 [cf 8:1-9])
- The Storm on the Sea of Galilee (vv 46-53)
- The Summarizing of His Ministry (vv 54-56)

REMEMBER, the authority of Jesus Christ is still being exhibited. Mankind’s response to that authority in all of its manifestations (partial, postponed or perfect) is still essentially two-fold in nature, unbelief versus belief.

**Its Eternal Value:**

The word and work of God is just as real today as it was then. We are still in danger of rejecting what is apparent and open. God desires for us to be a people of faith, to walk by faith and not by sight. Faith opens our eyes to the person and purpose of God.

The Holy Spirit is calling to us from this passage to consider three ideas.

**To Know:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to know Jesus is both King and Savior.

**To Choose:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to choose Him as our King and Savior.

**To Feel:** The Holy Spirit desires for us to feel the joy of resting in His rule and redemption.

**The Present Danger:**

How tragic is our unbelief in the face of irrefutable evidence. God is in our midst. It is the eye of faith that sees God in the details of life. The eternal purpose of God unfolds unabated. Nothing and no one will stop Him from fulfilling His purpose. Yet in our existence we can fail to appropriate the beauty and power of His word and works by walking in sight and not in faith. It is to our damnation that we fail to see the word and work of God in every aspect of our existence.

**The Problem:**

Unbelief rejects what God is doing in our midst. If we fail to walk by faith we will not give Him the glory that is rightfully His. "They were scandalized that a man who came from a background like Jesus should say and do things such as he. **Familiarity had bred a mistaken contempt.**" ([emphasis added] William Barclay, *Mark*, 138).

I think we need to address a significant issue right up front, and if we fail to do this we will place ourselves in considerable bondage and unnecessary fear. If I am tracking Mark's thoughts correctly, he has already established the authority of Jesus Christ over doctrine, demons, death, and disease. Some have readily accepted this and others are openly hostile to it, notably the religious leaders and political rulers. Jesus explains why this is so by providing us with instruction through various parables. One is either in the kingdom of light and life, or they still exist in a kingdom that is marked by darkness and death. The pivotal element as to what determines one's kingdom is faith. Do you believe Him or do you not? In all of the miracles we have studied thus far (Mark 4:35-5:43) faith in Him plays a most fundamental element. I think we view His miracles as happening arbitrarily or without consideration as to the faith of His people.

The work of Christ as presented in the Gospels functions on two levels. The first is national and the second is individual. His miracles to the nation were signs of who He was as Messiah and King. His miracles to the individual were salvific and redemptive. I think we often believe He performed a number of miracles on the unbelieving without the unbelieving ever coming to Him in faith and for personal, redemptive salvation. Such actions suggest He did miracles indiscriminately. I do not think Jesus healed anyone who stayed an unbeliever. I believe His miracles to the individual were redemptive and to the nation a sign of His kingly anointing setting Him apart as Messiah.

Why is this important? Faith is not bondage forming but a unique privilege given to the people of God in their relationship to God. Unbelievers do not have faith in God. Whatever “faith” they exhibit is not the same faith we have. God works in the unbelieving, but with them His working is very different than with the believing.

If we put Mark 6:1-6 in the flow of Mark’s story, those who are without faith are the unbelieving, and in their midst our Lord did not perform many miracles. The fact that He did not do many miracles there is because there were fewer believers in Nazareth. The lack of miracles in Nazareth is not because of a weak faith in the believing, but because there was a significant absence of believers. The events of Nazareth prove the proverb, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household.”

Jesus healed the storm in the presence of the disciple’s “unbelief.” The point in Mark 4:35-41 and following is in direct contrast to what we see in Nazareth. In Nazareth, it was not the absence of faith in the believing, but the predominate presence of the unbeliever. The unbelief in Mark 6:1-6 is not that of the believer, but the unbelief of the unbelieving.

Hence we need to be careful lest we think God is not performing the miracles because of our unbelief. God is working the miracles in our presence, in us, but He is not acting in behalf of the unbeliever. He acts in their behalf not because of them, but despite them. God stewards everything He created, even the unbelieving.

As further clarification let me note how the unbelieving do not have biblical faith. They have faith, but not in God. God is neither honoring their faith or belief. He is not in a Father child relationship. The relationship He sustains to them is as Creator, and His common grace is upon all He creates.

### **The Storyline:**

God is working to the unbelieving and walking in your midst. You reject Him at our peril. You must receive King Jesus as both Lord and Savior. In His rejection as a prophet, confirmation of His divine authority is made. He stands in a line of prophets whose ministry was often met with rejection.

Mark 6 is a real part of the storyline. Mark 6 shows the continued conflict between our Lord’s Kingship and those who would reject Him.

### **Questions:**

1. What pattern are we again seeing in verse 2? What is the primary expression of His ministry?
2. Would it be safe to conclude that His instruction is still that of Mark 1:14, 15?
3. How would you explain the dynamic between His teaching ministry and that of His miracles?
4. What was the response of the audience to His instruction?

5. Should we think of those who do not believe as unsaved or as unbelieving believers?
6. Why their perplexity? Why might He be rejected by those most familiar with Him?
7. Why might they be “offended” at what He said and did?
8. Was the audience aware of His mighty works? Why might this compound the negative aspect their response?
9. What is verse 4 saying to us today?
10. Why was Jesus limited in what He did according to verse 5 and 6?
11. Does Jesus always work through our willing or can He also work despite our willing or contrary to our willing?
12. How does this “translate” into our daily experiences and Christian walk?
13. Why did Jesus marvel?
14. Did unbelief keep Him from fulfilling His mission?

### Outline:

#### I. The Ministry of the Servant (v. 2)

“Preaching is something dangerously public that emerges from something intensely private.”  
(N.T. Wright, *Mark for Everyone*, 66).

##### A. His Wisdom

The word is **Sophia** and means “wisdom.” It is the only time that Mark uses the word. Wisdom is the practical application of truth as seen in one’s personal conduct. Luke uses it to describe Jesus during His boyhood years (Luke 2:40, 52). Paul uses the word to describe what Christ becomes to us (1 Corinthians 1:30). It is also used by Paul (Romans 16:27; 1 Timothy 1:17) and John (Revelation 5:12; 7:12) in expressions of worship and praise addressed toward God. Jesus in His life was characterized by wisdom, personified wisdom and thus is worthy of receiving the accolades/gift of wisdom.

Jesus taught Kingdom truth. He called people to repentance and to obedience. The repentance was to Him and the obedience was with Him. He does not call us to individual acts of obedience, but to a lifestyle of obedience. We are to follow Him as His disciple. As such He is working in us and through us His life.

His message was unlike anything before Him. Others said the kingdom is coming Jesus said, “It is here and I am the King.” This message was met with open resistance.

Verse 6 provides a “summary statement [describing] the teaching activity of Jesus around Nazareth.” (*Rogers and Rogers*, 78)

##### B. His Works

His works are described by the word **dunamai**. It is our English word dynamite. However, unlike our word, there is not the idea of destruction, but rather that of energy or ability to

accomplish a stated task. Jesus is described as having a **dunamai** to raise the dead, heal the sick, restore sight to the blind, and forgive the sinner. He had the energy or ability to do all this. And this caused the people great perplexity of mind and heart.

## II. The Perplexity of the People

### A. They were astonished (v. 2)

Mark employs a variety of terms to express the astonishment of the multitude and the disciples at the words and works of Jesus. The New American Standard often translates the various words with the same Greek word, "Amazed."

1. "Amazed" (1:22; 6:2; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18) - To strike out, to be exceedingly struck in mind, dumbfounded.
2. "Amazed" (5:20; 15:5; 44) - To wonder at, marvel
3. "Amazed" (12:17) - Intensive form of #2, to wonder greatly
4. "Amazed" (1:27; 10:24, 32) - To render immoveable, frequently associated with terror
5. "Amazed" (9:15) - 1xNT, intensive form of #4
6. "Amazed" (2:12; 5:42; 6:51) - To stand out from, to be beside oneself
7. "Afraid" (4:41; 5:15, 33, 36; 6:50; 9:32; 10:32) - To put to flight

My ongoing fear is that we lack this response to His words and works. There is something marvelous and breath-taking in His word and works. Because we fail to walk by faith we fail to see Him in the details. We have become comfortable with the uncommon. Let us beg God to remove the scales from our eyes in order that we might walk by faith and see the substance behind the shadow.

### B. They were scandalized (v. 3)

1. They were scandalized by His humble occupation ("carpenter")

"The people of Nazareth despised Jesus because he was a working-man. He was a man of the people, a layman, a simple man - and therefore they despised him." (William Barclay, *Mark*, 138). Jesus Christ became one of us in order that He might redeem us from sin's penalty, power, and presence.

2. They were scandalized by His questionable birth ("Mary's son")

"At one level, all that is said is that Jesus' origins imply that he is a very ordinary person. It was very unusual to refer to a Jewish man as the son of his mother, rather than his father. Is this a hint of doubts about the legitimacy of Jesus' birth? Is this a hint that Jesus has no human father because he is the Son of God? (*The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman [Oxford: University Press, 2001], 898).

“Having rejected any human source, they boggled at attributing them to a divine source: they were staggered by such an equation – they are offended, or stumbled at it.” (Cole, *Mark*, 107).

The word offended is **skandalon**. There are three basic definitions to the word.

- to trap
- to tempt to sin, enticement to apostasy
- that which gives offense or causes revulsion. That which arouses opposition.

To scandalize is simply the response toward the object, not the object proper. They had indignation and bewilderment which was brought on by a flagrant violation of religious opinion. Did Jesus violate present religious opinion? Absolutely, yet His wisdom and works were consistent with Biblical revelation. Their response to His ministry simply showed the hardness of their own hearts.

How tragic it is for us to be offended by the work and work of God. What if God raises the dead? What if God heals the diseased? What if God reconciles the disenfranchised? What if God restores the dysfunctional? What if God chooses to do what in unthinkable and even unimaginable? What is our response to this?

In all of our stories from Mark 4:35 and following there is consistent thread of faith. Faith appears throughout as a precondition to the miraculous. Is faith a precondition to the miraculous or is it a consequence of the miracle?

Some would argue from the passage that “the miracle does not generate faith; rather, faith must be present for the miracle to occur. This is the negative side of the positive correlation between faith and miracles seen already in Mark: miracles can and do take place in a context of faith (cf. 2:4; 5:43, 36); conversely, where there is no faith, miracles cannot occur.” (*The Oxford Bible Commentary*, Ed. John Barton and John Muddiman [Oxford: University Press, 2001], 897, 898).

Here is my tension with the absoluteness of his statement. Faith becomes a burden to be born and a tool to be exploited and expanded on. In the absoluteness of this statement every bad thing you’ve prayed over that had a negative outcome could be attributed to your lack of faith. Had you simply believed “enough” disease, death, depression, and dysfunction would have turned out the way you asked. Your child would not have gone astray, your marriage would not have failed, your bills would have been paid out, and your health would have been restored, had you simply believed.

We dismiss our unanswered prayers by simply saying, “It was not God’s will.” This statement is true, but how do we handle the faith factor?

In the outworking of God’s purpose, faith is present. Whether it is a precondition or a consequence, it is there. God works through faith, and God works in its absence. Faith does not hold God in bondage. It has never forced to do something that God does not desire or

willed. Your weak faith or apparent strength of faith is more for your edification than for His workings. And yet God invites us to believe. Through faith mountains are moved, and the fiery darts of persecution are squelched. The overriding element in all of our miracle stories is for us to believe that God is in control and that He truly cares. In contrast to faith, we now have a picture of un-faith or unbelief. Here I would like to consider three consequences of unbelief.

### III. The Stupidity of Unbelief

#### A. Unbelief Rejects the Familiar/Simple (vv. 3, 4)

“The proverbial saying appears in different forms on the lips of Jesus in Mt. 13:57 and John 4:44, as well as in [other ancient writings]. . . . It is best to regard it as a summarizing slogan about a common human experience.” (Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, NCB [Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1976], 160).

They questioned the authority of His power and couldn’t harmonize His wisdom and works with His origin and birthplace. Verse four used the compound word “without honor.” Honor is found only four times in the NT. The idea is that of “value, worth, price and recognition.”

Unbelief will not recognize who Jesus is. He is of no value and thus worthless and of little importance. “For Mark the people of Nazareth represent in their own way the blindness of the world.” (Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel of Mark*, NCB [Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1976], 161).

“The refusal -- or inability -- of Jesus' neighbors to accept his status confirms what the story has suggested thus far: the world's standards of judgment appear to run headlong into God's ways. Jesus does not measure up. The circumstances of his origin allow no way of accounting for the stories about him. His common beginnings do not fit the assessment that he is a prophet. The result is scandal and fear. The reaction of the people from his hometown also suggests that real insiders are not necessarily those who by birth or circumstance are closest to Jesus. In fact, those who ought to know best turn out to be the most incapable of insight. [Juel, *Mark*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament, pp. 92-93]

Williamson (*Mark*, Interpretation Commentaries) suggests the same thing: “...the reason his own people did not believe in Jesus was that they thought they knew him so well. “Is not this the carpenter, and are not his (relatives) here with us?” (v. 3). It was inconceivable to them that God could be at work in the commonplace” [p. 117].

#### B. Unbelief Stifles the Miraculous (v. 5)

The verse is loaded with power words. Our word “dynamite” occurs twice and is coupled with another power word. All this power was present yet stifled and lay dormant at the door of opportunity. Why? Because of unbelief. **God will not force the unwilling will. He can,**

**however, make the unwilling will willing.** There are certain areas in which God has chosen not to act. One of those areas is unbelief and the miraculous.

Just as fire burns so also faith and power coexists. Neither one is absolute, but both have normal or expected consequences. Fire does not always burn neither is faith always accompanied by open displays of power. Yet if I see burning I can assume fire and if I see power I can assume faith. Do we want to see power, then let us be encouraged to have faith.

### C. Unbelief Astonishes the Divine (v. 6)

Our understanding of God's offer is limited by finitude, thus God who has full knowledge of what His offer entails, stands "aghast" when finite man rejects an infinite gift. It is absolutely incredulous!! The word used to describe His response to their rejection/unbelief is **thaumazo**. It is found six times in Mark. It is used of a multitude (5:20), of His disciples (6:51), of the religious leaders (12:17), and of Pilate (15:5, 44) in response to His words and works. It is a strong emotional word conveying the idea of astonishment and bewilderment.

It almost suggests that in the presence of undisputable miracles faith would be the most natural outcome, yet despite the overwhelming proof, He is rejected.

### **Shepherding the Sheep** (What's the NEXT STEP?)

1. Are you receiving this message as from the Lord?
2. What is to be a primary expression of ministry at this local church?
3. Although God works in the absence of our will and contrary to our will, He often works in conjunction with our will. What are you willing as it relates to Jesus Christ and His kingdom?
4. Are you open to the miracle working power of Jesus Christ?
5. Thank God His words and works ring true with integrity. Thank God you have ears to hear and eyes to see the marvels of His goodness.
6. Offer yourself in faith to the power of God.
7. Pray for God to forgive your unbelief. Pray for ears to hear and eyes to see the marvels of His goodness.
8. What is keeping you from receiving Christ into your life? Maybe He is there, but only in name or only on the fringes of full involvement. Why not make Jesus a priority in your life. Whatever is so important to you is really quite insignificant when compared to the magnificence of Jesus Christ.