



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for January 31, 2010
Released on Wednesday, January 27, 2010**

“Revealed in Rejection”

Lesson Text: Matthew 13:54–58

Background Scripture: Matthew 11:20–24; 13:54–58; Luke 4:16–30

Devotional Reading: Isaiah 53:1–9

Matthew 13:54–58

54 And when he was come into his own country, he taught them in their synagogue, insomuch that they were astonished, and said, Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?

55 Is not this the carpenter’s son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

57 And they were offended in him. But Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.

58 And he did not many mighty works there because of their unbelief.

TODAY’S AIM

Facts: to study the dilemma Jesus faced in Nazareth, where the people were astonished at His teaching but failed to give Him honor in His own country.

Principle: to see how the humanity of Jesus can cause people to reject His divinity.

Application: to help people accept Jesus as the God-man, fully human and fully divine.

INTRODUCTION

This passage, from Matthew 13, puts us in Jesus’ second preaching tour of Galilee and His last visit to Nazareth. Prior to this passage, Jesus has to deal with opposition from Pharisees and scribes, plus an interruption by His own family members.

Intertwined are many of Jesus’ famous parables. Those who seek the truth find a revelation of the kingdom in those stories; curiosity seekers, on the other hand, “don’t get it” and drift away. The parables thus emphasize two ways that people can respond to Jesus: some will humble themselves and accept the truth; others will conclude that He doesn’t know what He’s talking about. As Jesus returns to familiar territory, which kind will He find? (The parallel is Mark 6:1–6.)

REJECTION IN NAZARETH (Matthew 13:54,56)

1. Where did Jesus go after Capernaum, and what mental hang-up did the people of Nazareth have regarding Jesus teaching in a synagogue (Matthew 13:54)?

Verse 53 says that "when Jesus had finished these parables, he departed thence." He probably had been ministering in Capernaum; so He now left there to return to His hometown of Nazareth.

"Jesus went into the synagogue as He had done previously and, again assuming the role of a Rabbi, He began to teach. The synagogue was devoted to a study of the Scriptures, and so no doubt Christ did teach the Scriptures. In response to His teaching, the audience had to face the question of His person" (Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ*, Zondervan). They were amazed at Jesus' teaching. Where had Jesus gained His knowledge since He had not been trained?

This was more than merely being impressed. The word translated "astonished" in Matthew 13:54 means "to be struck out of one's senses." As we often say today, they were blown away by what they were witnessing. It simply did not seem possible that this person they had watched grow up could be sitting there in their own synagogue teaching them the Scriptures. Such knowledge took a great deal of time to learn.

Rabbinical training was extensive and required many long hours of sitting at the feet of the learned men. Most of that training consisted of passing on traditional interpretations of the Scriptures, and people knew Jesus had not received such instruction. As far as they knew, Jesus had not received even the first semester of the training that would have prepared Him for this.

2. Why were the people curious about Jesus' "mighty works" (miraculous powers)?

The crowd's remark reflects amazement at Jesus' miraculous power as well. Since they know Jesus and His background, they do not understand the source of His abilities. Where is all this coming from?

The word "whence" thus can take one of two directions. Asking this with a sincere concern for truth will lead to the right conclusion. Asking this with a cynical skepticism will lead to a different conclusion entirely (compare Matthew 12:24).

3. What identity did Jesus have through Joseph (v. 55)?

The people's skepticism appears to reflect a belief that people draw their identities from their background; therefore people should not or will not go beyond the circumstances of their upbringing.

The people proceed to list what they know about Jesus. They use Jesus' biographical information to confirm their suspicion that He is doing and saying things that He ought not. The phrase *the carpenter's son* associates Him with Joseph. The implication is that Jesus, who apparently has been a carpenter himself (compare Mark 6:3), lacks the education necessary to speak on such important matters.

4. Who is someone from (or in) humble circumstances who has taught you something important about life and faith? How can your church give a wider voice to the wisdom of such people?

Spiritual insight may come from unexpected sources: the elderly, the poor, children, addicts, and those who have been beaten up by life. Missionaries sometimes feel that they have learned more from the people they were sent to serve than they have taught them. Ways to honor and learn from overlooked members of the body include allowing them to give a testimony on video to be shown to the congregation, or perhaps setting up one-on-one mentoring opportunities.

5. What person living in Nazareth did the people use as a reference (vs. 55,56)?

The allusion to Jesus' *mother*, *brothers*, and *sisters* emphasizes familiarity with the entire family. Their mention was simply part of the argument that Jesus was no more than a common person with a common family. Certainly not a person who would grow up to work miracles or teach in synagogues across the country at age 30!

Thus, the people close their comments by returning to a previous point: What is the source of His abilities? The fact that they are *offended in him* shows us the attitude behind their insincere questions.

RESTRICTION IN NAZARETH (Matthew 13:57,58)

6. What reason did Jesus give as an explanation for His lack of reception in Nazareth (Matthew 13:57)?

"Jesus' claims caused the people in His hometown to be offended at Him. They stumbled over His words and could not accept them. They were offended that others could be impressed by Jesus and follow Him. He was one of their peers, and their preconceived notions about who He was made it impossible for them to accept His message. They also may have been jealous. Jesus had come to them as a prophet, but they saw only a hometown boy" (Osborne and Comfort, eds., *Life Application Bible Commentary*, Tyndale).

Ironically, the fact that the Nazarenes reject Jesus actually proves the validity of His teaching: true prophets tend to be rejected, especially in their *own country*, since their message of the need to repent is rarely popular. The examples of Elijah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel confirm this. False prophets, on the other hand, tend to be welcomed, since they tell the people what they want to hear (2 Timothy 4:3).

7. Why do many people react negatively to the truth?

It is an amazing fact that spiritual truth is so offensive to people who are determined to continue in a worldly lifestyle. Anyone who has done any amount of personal witnessing knows how violently some people react when presented with the truth of the gospel. We recognize that the gospel arouses guilt when people listen to it, especially if they are involved in a very worldly lifestyle and do not want anything to interrupt that. The sad truth is that one day they will face reality, and it will be too late.

This kind of reaction to the gospel demonstrates the truth of what the Apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian church: "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (2 Corinthians 4:3,4).

Such rejection should cause those of us who believe to be extremely thankful to the Lord for allowing us the privilege of hearing the gospel and having receptive hearts for it. Those who have refused to respond are still going to be accountable to God. According to Romans 1:19, they have an innate knowledge of their need for a relationship with Him. He is also clearly visible in creation (v. 20); so "they are without excuse."

8. As a result of Jesus' rejection by the people of Nazareth, what was He unable to do (v. 58)?

Because they were "offended" at His message "He did not many mighty works" (miracles) there due to their unbelief. Jesus' power was not limited by man's faith, but was exercised in response to it. The few works He does do (Mark 6:5) are directed to the minority who accept His teaching.

In any case, the tragedy of the situation is that the claim to know Jesus causes the people of Nazareth to miss out on the blessings He can bring them. "This has to be one of the most sorrowful statements in the Bible. Imagine Jesus leaving His

hometown, with many people whom He has loved, unable to find the faith that He found in a Gentile centurion (8:13). His own family and close friends were fulfilling Matthew 13:14-15--hearing, but not understanding" (Anders and Weber, *Holman New Testament Commentary*, Broadman & Holman). Surely the lack of understanding and acceptance in Jesus' hometown demonstrates how dark the minds of unbelievers are when it comes to spiritual truth.

Do not be surprised that those you work with seem to be unable to comprehend what you are saying when you witness to them. Satan has blinded their minds to spiritual reality. Continue to witness, but pray that the Lord will soften their hearts and open their minds, giving them an opportunity to comprehend and receive Jesus personally.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** God's own Son taught in small, local assemblies. No venue is too lowly for the preaching of God's Word (Matthew 13:54a).
- 2.** People are often astonished by a familiar figure serving God in an important way (v. 54b).
- 3.** What becomes overly familiar to people loses value in their estimation (v. 55a).
- 4.** People often form expectations based on merely vague knowledge of the past (v. 55b).
- 5.** Sadly, people often become jealous when someone they have known achieves prominence (v. 56).
- 6.** Jesus is never surprised by evil responses to Him; all is part of God's plan (vs. 57,58).

CONCLUSION

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

The great theologian and church father Augustine (AD 354–430) stated that the expression "familiarity breeds contempt" was already common in his time. This old Latin proverb could well be a paraphrase of Jesus' comment about "a prophet without honor." It remains a simple fact that we are less impressed with things and people the longer we are exposed to them.

We run a great danger when familiarity makes us take the power and love of Jesus for granted. Those who have been Christians for some time may recall that they felt more "on fire" in the earlier days of their faith, when each page of Scripture seemed to open a whole world of insight. As we become more acquainted with Christ and His teachings over the years, some of the luster can wear off if we are not careful to examine ourselves. Maybe that was the problem the ancient Israelites had during Moses' day. Seeing the miraculous "pillar of cloud" and "pillar of fire" all the time should have increased their devotion to God (Exodus 13:21, 22). But familiarity bred contempt (Numbers 14:11).

Today's passages stress that we can never let Jesus become so familiar that we doubt His ability or challenge His right to go beyond our expectations. If we do, we become worse than those who never knew Him in the first place.

PRAYER

Lord, often we are tempted to make You in our own image and to imagine that we know You better than You know us. Please continue to surprise us by doing things that go beyond what we expect. Help us appreciate the wonders of Your power. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Christ should never receive less than the highest honor.

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

In February we move to testimonies to Jesus as Messiah. Next week's lesson is "Recognized by a Canaanite Woman." Jesus tested this woman then cast a demon out of her daughter when He determined the greatness of her faith and persistence. Study Matthew 15:21-28.

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