

**Misperceptions of Jesus: #4**  
**"Jesus: The Prophet without Honor"**

**Matt. 13:53-58**

--NEFC 12/10/00

*Topic: Jesus; Mystery of the Kingdom*

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During this season of Advent we often refer to Old Testament Scripture

which points forward to the coming of Christ.

One of the most explicit passages in this regard is undoubtedly Isaiah chap. 53

which speaks of the Servant of the Lord.

Written hundreds of years before the birth of Christ,

this chapter is often said to be

one of the clearest descriptions of the coming Messiah

and his saving work on the cross

found anywhere in the Bible.

Speaking of this Servant, it says,

**"He was despised and rejected by men,**

**a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering.**

**Like one from whom men hide their faces**

**he was despised,**

**and we esteemed him not.**

**Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,**

**yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.**

**But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;**

**the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,**

and by his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:3-5).

It's a wonderful passage,

but I'm not sure we really believe what it says in v. 2 of that chapter--

**"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,**

**nothing in his appearance that we should desire him"** (Isa. 53:2).

Somehow, we get it into our heads

that Jesus must have been a magnificent figure of a man.

We instinctively impute to him our human ideals--

and every culture has its own.

He must have been tall, or muscular,

or had dark skin, or had beautiful blue eyes,

or whatever.

There must have been something ~~exceptionally striking~~ about him,

something that signaled his unique, divine character.

And we imagine what it would have been like to be there--back then--

to be able to walk with Jesus.

To see him and to hear him--

if only we had been there, it would be easy to believe him

and to trust him.

But it is interesting,

in the entire Bible, this is the only passage--Is 53:2--

that says anything at all about Jesus' physical appearance.

And all it says is that he was very, well, *ordinary*--

**"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,**

nothing in his appearance that we should desire him" (Isa. 53:2).

If you entered a time-machine and showed up in Galilee in A.D. 25

you would not be able to pick Jesus of Nazareth out of a crowd.

Do you believe that?

Do you really believe that?

That Jesus Christ, the Son of God,

was, by all appearances, a very ordinary man.

He grew up in Galilee—

a part of Israel held in low regard by the elites in Jerusalem,

sort of the way Mississippi is viewed today by those who live in New York.

His home town was really a small village

which had at the most 2,000 inhabitants,

and probably closer to 500.

Nazareth was nothing to speak of—

and I think of Nathanael's comment when he was first told of Jesus of Nazareth.

**"Nazareth!"** he exclaimed. **"Can anything good come from there?"** (Jn 1:46).

Jesus may have displayed a certain aptitude for religion as a boy,

but he never enjoyed the privilege of a formal rabbinical education.

Instead, he learned his father's trade as a carpenter or builder of some sort.

He probably got work in the Galilean capital city of Sepphoris,

only four miles north of Nazareth,

which King Antipas had begun rebuilding when Jesus was a child.

We really don't know anything else about him from that period.

But there was evidently nothing there

that would have led those who knew him then

to suspect that he would become some powerful spokesman for God.

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Ah yes, but what about his birth?

Now that was spectacular wasn't it?

full of miraculous signs pointing to his future destiny?

He was born of a young virgin woman, that's what the Gospels tell us--

but it's extremely doubtful that that story

was widely circulated by his parents during his lifetime.

Who would have believed it?

That virgin birth story sure sounds like a cover-up,

and rumors of it created no small hint of scandal.

And there was the spectacular announcement of his birth by the angelic host.

But the angels only spoke to a group of shepherds in their fields--

and shepherds were among the least credible witnesses in Israel.

Shepherds lived on the fringes of society.

They were considered unclean,

because their occupation kept them from keeping the law.

And shepherds were not allowed to testify as witnesses in court.

All those hours alone outside at night--

they could see all kinds of things.

The people of Nazareth may have heard  
that some men of wealth and station from the East  
had come to pay honor to this child soon after his birth down in Judea--  
but these Magi were pagan astrologers,  
not Jewish theologians.

None of the leaders in Jerusalem  
recognized him as anything special.

And he did get into some kind of trouble down there, they'd heard,  
and had to run away to Egypt for a while until things cooled off.

This is not exactly the kind of entry into the world you would expect for a royal child--  
the Messiah of Israel, the Son of God.

Yes, there were some unusual rumors circulating about his birth,  
but they could hardly be true--  
just look at him--he's just an ordinary Joe. /

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So what were they to think  
when this Jesus and his apostolic band strolled into town one day,  
and he began preaching in their synagogue.  
He had left town not too long ago to go down to Judea see that fellow named John  
who was baptizing people in the Jordan River.  
Now he'd come back as an itinerant rabbi--  
a peripatetic preacher,  
wandering around living off the support of his followers.  
And his followers—they were a disreputable bunch—



Where then did this man get all these things?"

57 And they took offense at him.

But Jesus said to them,

"Only in his hometown and in his own house

is a prophet without honor."

Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah,

Jesus, the very Son of God—

Jesus was a prophet without honor in his own hometown. //

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What should we learn from this episode in the life of Jesus?

I want to highlight three lessons for us

that emerge from this story.

The first is a general one that Jesus had to address wherever he went,

and it is simply this--

**I. Don't be Scandalized by the Mystery of the Kingdom Jesus Proclaimed.**

The kingdom which Jesus proclaimed and which he embodied

was not what his listeners expected to see and hear.

It's not the kind of kingdom that fits the standards of this world.

Whereas in this world

we're told that only the strong survive,

in God's kingdom as Jesus proclaimed it,

God's strength is perfected in our weakness.

Whereas in this world

we're told that you have to look out for number one,  
or nobody else will.

In God's kingdom Jesus says, "Do not resist an evil person--

if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic,  
let him have your cloak as well.

If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who asks you,

and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you" (Matt. 5:40-42).

Whereas in this world

we're told: "Don't get mad, just get even."

In God's kingdom, Jesus says, "Forgive and you will be forgiven" (Lk. 6:47);

"For in the same you judge others, you will be judged" (Mt. 7:2)

Whereas in this world

we're told: "Money buys power, pleasure, and prestige, so seek money;  
and "He who has the most toys wins."

In God's kingdom, Jesus says,

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth,  
where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal."

"But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19),

"Seek first God's kingdom and his righteousness" (Mt. 6:33).

And whereas in this world

we're told: real greatness comes in counting how many people work for you,

In God's kingdom Jesus says,

**"The greatest among you shall be the servant of all"** (Mt. 20:27). /

What kind of a kingdom is this

in which the last shall be first,

and the least shall be the greatest?

What kind of a kingdom is this

in which those who give shall receive

and those who die shall live?

Everything is topsy-turvy here--

everything seems to be turned on its head.

It is no wonder that people couldn't understand, and took offense.

What kind of a kingdom is this

in which the glorious King will come in the humility of a baby

born in a manger

and in the humiliation of a man

who dies on a cross?

What in the world is going on here?

In the Jewish mind

the coming of the kingdom of God was supposed to mean national liberation,

political freedom

and economic prosperity.

The Romans would be banished and Israel would live in peace.

But Jesus brought none of that.

What Jesus proclaimed was a radically mystifying message--

Jesus has come as a most unusual king

inviting us to participate in a most unusual kingdom.

It is like a tiny mustard seed, the smallest of seeds,

but which grows into the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree

in which birds can build their nests.

Or it is like yeast that a woman takes

and mixes into a large amount of flour,

and it works its way all through the dough (Matt. 13:31-33).

That which is to us small and insignificant

will, in God's purposes and by his power,

issue in something that is great and glorious,

working in ways that are secret and silent and outside our view.

This is the mystery of the kingdom in the ministry of Jesus--

a humble beginning will issue in a great and glorious destiny.

Don't take offense at his mysterious kingdom,

don't be scandalized by it.

God's ways are not our ways--

and when things aren't going your way,

you need to remember that.

God works out his purpose, often through pain and hardship,  
and through weakness and humility. /

As we are engaged right now in a fierce political fight over Presidential power,  
I think of a story of a seventh century Anglican bishop named Chad  
who was elected and duly installed as archbishop of York.

But some bishops contested his ordination  
contending that his consecration had not been rightly performed.

Instead of ferociously seeking to hold on to power,  
which is the way the world works,  
Chad humbly withdrew in favor of the other candidate to preserve unity.

Rather than cause division in the church,

Chad is said to have told the Archbishop of Canterbury:

"If you decide that I have not rightly received the Episcopal character,  
I willingly lay down the office;  
for I have never thought myself worthy of it,  
but under obedience, I, though unworthy, consented to undertake it."

The archbishop of Canterbury was so impressed with Chad's humility, the story goes,  
that he ordained him bishop of Lichfield instead."<sup>1</sup>

The suggested prayer on the feast of St. Chad is this:

"Keep us, we pray, from thinking of ourselves  
more highly than we ought to think,

<sup>1</sup>Robin Galiano, *Washington Times*, p. A1; Nov. 30, 2000.

and ready at all times to step aside for others,  
in honor preferring one another,  
that the cause of Christ may be advanced."

This kind of attitude obviously does not represent the kings, or Presidents,  
of this world.

The City of God operates much differently than the City of Man.

God judges by a different standard,  
he operates with different values--  
and he entered into this world as an ordinary man,  
to bring us to himself.

The widow who put two pennies into the temple offering box  
received Jesus' praise;  
and maybe a church of only 200 that is faithful before God  
can be commended by him more than the megachurches  
that get all the world's attention.

So don't despise the ordinary, the lowly, the humble--  
that may be just where God's kingdom is to be found.

Beware of assuming the world's values when looking for God's kingdom.

Those in the Gospels who do that  
never see what is right before their eyes--  
God in human flesh.

As Paul puts it:

**"the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom,**

and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength” (1 Cor. 1:25).

“but we preach Christ crucified:

a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles” (1 Cor. 1:23).

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In our day this scandal of the mystery of the kingdom of God

takes a very common focus--

that is, the scandal of particularity,

the scandal of exclusivity.

People are scandalized by the notion

that the God of heaven and earth, the God of all places and all time,

should reveal himself in this one particular man

in this one particular place

in this one particular time in human history.

That's not fair--

if God is God, he has to reveal himself to everyone

in every place

in every time

in just the same way.

Otherwise, he's showing favorites.

That would be, well, scandalous!

We're passionate about fairness, aren't we?

Everybody has to be treated in just the same way.

Everybody has to have the same opportunity.

Everybody has to have the same outcome.

That's what equality demands.

So how can God just reveal himself in this one man Jesus  
in a backwoods, out-of-the-way place like Nazareth?  
How can Jesus be the only way, exclusively?  
It's just not fair.

Many people in our day are scandalized by this mystery of the kingdom.

That's not the way we would do it--  
but this is the way God did it--  
in his infinite wisdom, this is the way God has chosen to act.

So I urge you,  
Don't be scandalized by this mystery of the kingdom.  
We must receive what God has revealed.

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But in going home to Nazareth,  
Jesus encountered a special form of this scandal.

He was a hometown boy--  
in this small town everybody knows everybody else,  
and they thought they knew him.

They were familiar with his parents.  
They were familiar with his brothers and sisters.  
And they were familiar with him.

“Come on, he's nobody special!”

As they say, "familiarity breeds contempt."

And that's how they treated him.

But I urge you, this morning, don't let such familiarity breed contempt

in your relationship with Jesus./

Again, I think we live in a culture that is particularly prone to this problem.

In our world, newer is always better--

we've got to have the latest edition,

the updated version,

the hottest new release.

The shelf life of a new phone is less than three years.

We demand that ideas be fresh, novel, and innovative.

Things have to be exciting and entertaining--

God forbid that something be labeled "boring."

Let me tell you, I struggle with that as a preacher.

What can I say to you that you have not already heard before?

As week after week I'm called

to expound the words of this 2000-year-old book.

How easy it is to say, "I've heard that before," and then just turn it off.

Maybe you come to a Sunday school class that's dealing with prayer

and you've already studied prayer--

so you say, "I don't need that."

That's just elementary, that's for beginners, that too ordinary.

I want something new, something different.

But most of what we do in the church,

and what I do as a pastor,

is simply a matter of reminding you of what you already know.

And the constant danger is that familiarity will breed contempt.

You can become inoculated against the truth--

just as these Nazarenes were in our passage.

Familiarity breeds contempt.

We know it can happen in a marriage—

the relationship grows stale just out of inattention,

when there is not investment to grow deeper.

Don't let that happen to you.

And that same familiarity can breed contempt in a whole culture--

in the whole post-Christian Western world.

For more than a thousand years,

the center of the Christian church was in Europe,

but now Europeans have little if no interest in the message of the Bible,

and that is becoming increasingly so here.

That's not to say there's no interest in "spirituality"--

"spirituality" has become a hot topic--

but it's not *Christian* spirituality--

Almost any form of non-Christian "spirituality" is received with great interest,  
no matter how bizarre.  
In this country I think of what could be called "Oprah Religion"--  
way out ideas about the life force,  
that is the consciousness of the world,  
found in the whales and dolphins, for example.  
People are eating this up--  
because familiarity with Christian things,  
over the course of centuries, has taken its toll.  
Christianity is old news—  
"been there, done that." /

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So what can you do to avoid such a contempt?

I think it begins by humbling yourself before God and his word.

Don't ever think that you have mastered the Scripture,

because the Scripture is the revelation of God--

and you can never master God.

You can't put him in a box, and think you've got him all figured out.

That's dangerous!

There is always more of him to know,

more of him to understand

and more of him to believe and obey.

That's why I've never had much patience

when my kids have come home on a Sunday

and said they were bored in Sunday School  
because they were discussing a story they already knew.  
I used to tell them to just use the opportunity to think more deeply about that story--  
maybe there is something there you've never seen before.  
Maybe it will apply to you differently now than it did before,  
since you are not the same person you were then.  
Maybe you can learn new ways to communicate the message of that story to others.

God always has more of himself that he wants to reveal to us.

Come to his Word and come to worship each week  
with a sense of expectation—

“Lord, what do you want me to see about you today?”

Don't let yourself feel overly familiar with any part of God's revelation of himself,  
or you will surely miss something--  
perhaps something essential--  
like these Nazarenes who missed the day God visited them in person.

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**I. Don't be Scandalized by the Mystery of the Kingdom--**

**II. Don't Let Familiarity Breed Contempt--**

and finally, I think this passage teaches us that

**III. You must believe so that you may see.**

People often say that "seeing is believing."

But *these* people saw--

they saw Jesus healing the sick and casting out demons,

they saw him as he preached the message of the kingdom,  
they saw him draw people of all kinds--outcasts and sinners--  
to himself.

They saw, but they did not believe.

They were offended instead.

In this case, seeing was not believing.

And in fact, their not believing meant that they would not see either.

Look at the last verse of our passage--

v. 58--"**And [Jesus] did not do many miracles there [in Nazareth]  
because of their lack of faith.**"

Mark, in his version of the story, says it even more strongly--

Mark 6:5--"**Jesus could not do any miracles there,  
except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.**

**And he was amazed at their lack of faith."**

I don't think that this is saying that Jesus is powerless to act apart from our faith.

We see Jesus act in power a number of times

without any faith exhibited by the beneficiaries of that act--

he fed the 5,000, he stilled the storm, he healed the demonic of Gadarene.

Mark's "could not" here has more to do with Jesus' mission.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus would not perform miracles on demand,  
nor would he do them to overwhelm the doubts of the skeptic.

His acts of gracious power were signs—  
demonstrations of his mercy and grace  
toward all who come to him in faith.

In this, Jesus was simply acting the way his Father acts--  
we are not confronted with spectacular suspensions  
of the laws of nature at every turn  
as God's means of trying to convince us to love and obey him.

He usually acts in what we would regard as very ordinary ways--

he provides us with the sun and rain,  
our daily bread,  
and the simple joys of love and friendship.

He speaks to us in the still small voice--  
by his word in the Bible and in our hearts,  
and then he calls us to turn to him.

And it is only after we respond--

only after we turn to him in faith,  
and surrender our lives to him in obedience--  
only then are our eyes opened to see all that he is,  
and all that he does,  
all the time,  
in every place for us.

<sup>2</sup>So Carson.

Suddenly, after we believe,

all of creation is like a great canvas on which God is displaying his majesty.

It is after we believe that the church becomes a wonderful family

in which God is pouring out his love.

And whereas before, the Bible seemed like nothing but words on a page,

now we see marvelous things that speaks to the depths of our hearts.

Now, because we believe, we see what we didn't and couldn't see before,.

And this is the way it works--

notice the order--

we must believe in order to see.

God has given us all the evidence we need;

we have credible witnesses to his works of power in Christ.

We simply need to receive what he has revealed,

and trust him enough to obey,

if we want to see more.

I think of that powerful demonstration of power recorded in John 11--

Jesus' friend Lazarus had died and when Jesus arrived

he was met by his sister Martha,

and after some words between them,

**Jesus says to her, "Take away the stone from the tomb."**

**"But Lord," she said, "by this time there is a bad odor,**

**for he has been there four days."**

**Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed,**

you would see the glory of God" (John 11:38-40).

If you believe, you will see.

Martha did believe--and she ordered the stone rolled away.

And she saw--her brother came out of that tomb.

But in Nazareth, Jesus did not do many miracles

because of their lack of faith.

They did not see,

because they did not believe.

I don't know what kind of miracles Jesus might want to do among us--

that's always up to him, not me.

I would never dare to dictate to him how he must act.

And there's nothing I can do to force his hand--

nothing I do controls the power of God.

But this passage does suggest to me that my lack of faith,

my refusal to trust God and to believe that he is God,

and that he is able to do whatever he wants to do--

my lack of faith can hinder his work.

And I will never see all that he wants me to see

unless I first trust him.

Just as I must believe in this chair and actually sit in it,

if I want to see that it will, in fact, hold me up.

Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believed,  
you would see the glory of God."

Do you want to see the glory of God? //

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I've been a Christian for nearly fifty years--

but I feel as though I have barely begun.

Whatever familiarity I have with the ways of God

only helps me to know how mysterious those ways can be.

But the challenge remains for me and for you--

will I believe so that I can see?--

so that even now in a small way,

and one day in all its fullness--

that I may see the glory of God.

You must believe enough to pray

so that you may then see God at work in answer to your prayer.

You must believe enough to give,

so that you may then see God at work supplying your need.

You must believe enough to forgive,

so that you might then see God heal relationships

and open your heart to his love.

You must believe—and act on that faith—  
if you want to see God at work in your life.

Psa. 25:14—"The LORD confides in those who fear him;  
he makes his covenant known to them."

We must believe if we want to see.

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One day, all will be revealed,  
The kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven,  
We will be lost in wonder at the ever unfolding majesty of God--  
that sight,  
that future, awaits all who will believe.  
May we not be like those Nazarenes who thought they had it all figured out--  
because when they were given their chance,  
they missed it.

Don't be scandalized by the wisdom of God;  
Don't let your familiarity with the gospel lead you to take it for granted  
and blind you to its goodness and truth.  
And don't forget that you must believe, you must trust, you must obey,  
if you want to see the glory of God in your life.

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Prayer—

John 1:10-13--"He was in the world, and though the world was made through him,  
the world did not recognize him.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.

Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name,

he gave the right to become children of God--

children born not of natural descent,

nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God."

Closing Song: *#127 Thou Dids't Leave Thy Throne [vv. 1,2,4,5]*

Benediction:

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him,

so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Rom. 15:13

Dec. 8, 2019

**"Misperceptions of Jesus--  
Jesus: The Prophet without Honor"  
Matt. 13:53-58**

In a small town, where everybody knew everybody else, they thought they knew all about the first-born son of Joseph the carpenter. So when Jesus came to town acting like a prophet or more, they couldn't believe what they heard and saw.

This morning we consider what this scandal tells us about this mysterious Messiah and his message of the coming of God's kingdom.

**I. Don't be Scandalized by the Mystery of the Kingdom.**

**II. Don't Let Familiarity Breed Contempt.**

**III. Believe so that You May See.**

*"He came to that which was his own,  
but his own did not receive him.  
Yet to all who received him,  
to those who believed in his name,  
he gave the right to become children of God"*  
--John 1:11 ,12

**Sermon Response:**

**"Misperceptions of Jesus--  
Jesus: The Prophet without Honor"  
Matt. 13:53-58**

- Have you seen examples of Jesus' observation that "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor"? Why would this be true? Would those in Nazareth be less likely than others to believe in him? Is that fair?
- What does the reaction of the people of Nazareth tell us about the nature of Jesus' earlier life there? Would any of us have recognized him as the Son of God if we had been in Nazareth when he was younger? What light does that shed on your perception of Jesus?
- Read v. 58. What is the relationship between miracles and faith? What are ways that your lack of faith hinders God's work in your life? What can you do about that? Is there some area in your life in which you need to trust God more? What would that look like?
- If familiarity breeds contempt, how can we keep our perception of Jesus fresh? What can foster an unhealthy familiarity?
- Why do you suppose God came among us in such an obscure way, as a baby born to a working class family in an out-of-the-way part of the world? What is God's purpose in doing it this way?

- Take time to pray in your group—Pray for fresh eyes to see Jesus in all this goodness and beauty and truth. Pray for that faith to act on his word so that you may see his glory.