

No One Like Jesus: Homecoming
By Jason Huff
August 28, 2016
Daniel 9:1-10; James 5:10-11; Matthew 13:54-58

Our final Scripture reading today comes from Matthew 13:54-58. This is the Word of the Lord. "Coming to his hometown, [Jesus] began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" 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." And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith."

Did you know techno originated in Detroit? You might not even know what techno is. Techno is a form of electronic dance music that got its start just outside of Ann Arbor in the mid-1980s. With a fast beat, lots of synthesizers, and heavy bass and drums, techno became a global sensation that revolutionized European pop for the last three decades. You can hear its influence in American pop today. The Grammys have given out an electronica/dance award since 2005.

But despite my love of music, the first time I'd heard that techno started in Detroit was at the Detroit Historical Museum a few weeks ago. I knew Detroit was the home of Motown. I knew about big Detroit acts like Madonna, Kid Rock, and Alice Cooper. But I had no clue that techno started in this area. Most people in Detroit probably couldn't even name a techno artist.

What does techno music have to do with Jesus? It illustrates something from today's passage – that often, something or someone incredibly influential may never be known in their hometown. It has baffled many over the years how Jesus was rejected in his hometown. It has made some question the Bible if the people who lived with Him for thirty years were so offended by Him. How could they not believe He was the Son of God after living that long with Him?

And yet trailblazers are often forgotten. Thomas Edison is far better known than Nicolai Tesla. How many of us remember from history that our part of the world was named not after Christopher Columbus but the explorer Amerigo Vespucci? If Jesus was just a moral teacher who never made it outside the backwaters of the Roman Empire, we would have never heard of Him. Yet despite what His hometown thought, who Jesus is has changed the world.

Jesus lives in Capernaum now but has returned to Nazareth. He's invited to teach in the synagogue, an honor given to traveling rabbis and priests. But when He starts teaching the Nazarenes about the Kingdom of God, they aren't just rubbed the wrong way. The word in the Greek is where we get our word "scandal" from. They were scandalized by Him. The original meaning implies that they were led to sin over it, they were so shocked and angered. The New Living Testament translation captures it well when it says, "They were deeply offended and refused to believe in him." If this event is the same one described in Luke 4, which it might be, some were so mad they wanted to take him to the edge of town and throw Him off a cliffside!

But what enraged them? This passage doesn't tell us Jesus' words, which astonish them. Instead, there are two real flashpoints. The first is their personal knowledge of Jesus, and second is their personal knowledge of Jesus' family. Their first complaint is, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" They didn't deny Jesus' miracles or His teaching. Instead, they were flabbergasted because Jesus was so different from their expectations.

Why is that? It's our first point this morning: *Jesus was humble to His very core and models humility for us.* He didn't become human begrudgingly or constantly fight against His new limits. He embraced His humanity. He was the perfect human. He was truly human in ways that we cannot yet be because of our sin.

As one author put it, the reaction of the Nazarenes to Jesus' extraordinary teaching and miracles testifies to Jesus' "true and real humanity...during all His first thirty years His townsmen had discovered nothing about Him different from other men."ⁱ It also proved "His wonderful humility and self-denial...He never gave any indications of [His status as the Son of God] for thirty years, because His hour was not yet come."ⁱⁱⁱ

Stories written a few hundred years after Jesus told made-up tales of His youth and Him using His divine power. One famous one described Him making clay pigeons and bringing them to life. These tales weren't true and were never even considered Scripture, but the idea fascinates us. What would we do with miraculous power if we were God's child at age eight?

But this passage illustrates that Jesus was incredibly normal. He didn't brag about being the Son of God. He didn't lord it over others like Joseph who lorded his amazing Technicolor coat over his brothers. He didn't perform miracles to impress people. He lived as a carpenter until God's time came. He didn't study under the learned rabbis of Jerusalem. In all ways but one, he was just like everyone else in Nazareth – we'll talk about that in a minute. The people of Nazareth were amazed because Jesus seemed so ordinary.

Christian means "little Christ." We are to imitate Jesus just as Jesus imitated the Father. One key way we can do that is through humility. Jesus could have demanded the people of Nazareth worship Him – He is the King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Great I Am, God With Us. Yet He not only didn't demand any of those things, He served us. He lived in such a way that for thirty years, almost no one knew the Prince of Heaven was among them.

Developing the humility of Jesus is the only way to avoid developing the sinful habit of pride. Someone once told me that they deserved heaven and others didn't because he'd chosen to follow Christ and others didn't. That's pride. Believing we're better than others because we go to church each week or pray or tithe? Pride. Pride destroys our ability to show others the love of God, and left unchecked, it will destroy our faith.

But when we are humble, we are approachable and knowable. When we are humble, people see it stand out against a world of people only out for themselves. Humility helps us have peace because we don't think we deserve more than we have; we find joy in whatever God has given us. And when we are humble, if we are following Jesus faithfully, when people see us, they won't see us so much as they will see Jesus shining through us.

That said, Jesus' humility didn't win over His hometown. Why? It's true for us too; not everyone like us even if through the grace of God we are successful at being humble and kind and patient. It's our second main point this morning: *Jesus is a painful mirror for our own hearts until we begin to reflect His image back at Him.*

Isn't it funny that the Nazarenes don't have anything to say about Jesus Himself? If Jesus had been a sinner, it would have been easy to attack Him. "I remember when Jesus sinned – he can't be the Son of God!" But instead, what do they say? "We know his mom and dad. We know his brothers and sisters. How could *He* be the Messiah? How could *He* be the fulfillment of prophecy?"

Their chief complaint about Jesus is not what He's teaching – they were struck with astonishment at that! In common terms, He's gotten too big for His britches. He needs to be put in His place. Who do you think you are? You're just the carpenter's son, Mary's little boy! Your brothers and sisters aren't anything special. You need to be taken down a notch or two.

In our worst moments, we do this too. Ever go on Facebook and find a friend you haven't seen in decades? You poke around their profile a little bit to see what they're up to. It's fine if they're successful, but not *too* successful. What, that guy's now a corporate VP? I had to tutor him in high school! She's a power broker in Washington, DC? What strings did she pull to get that job? We get jealous, envious. We knew them "when." Now they've pulled ahead of us in the worldly success department and all of a sudden, we're like, waitaminute!

But it's even worse for the people of Nazareth. As I said a minute ago, one thing did make Jesus different from all the other kids growing up in that small town. He didn't sin. Because of that truth, we know He was obedient to His parents. He helped other people. He didn't complain or gripe. He held His tongue. He didn't pick fights. We don't have to have the history of His childhood in the Bible because if He was without sin, these things have to be true.

As kids – and even as adults – we can't stand it when someone is taller, faster, stronger, smarter, or more well-liked than we are. It's why bullying happens. Now imagine growing up with Jesus in your hometown. Imagine being compared to Him. Every little kid is held up to the mirror of Jesus. In how many Nazareth households when time for chores came around did they hear, "Why can't you be more like Jesus? He never complains about feeding the animals and helping in the wood shop!"

No wonder the people of Nazareth wouldn't listen. Against His example, everybody else came up woefully short. Is it any wonder that His brothers James and Jude didn't become believers until well after His death and resurrection? They lived with that mirror every day of their young lives. And instead of embracing Him, for a time, they rejected Him too. They hated the mirror of Jesus for what it showed them. When we look in the mirror of Jesus, if we're only looking for our own reflection rather for Jesus Himself, we see every flaw and imperfection we have. We can either blame the mirror, refuse to look in it altogether, or change what it is we see.

When you look at Jesus, what do you see? If you look at Him to compare yourself, to see how you rate against God's faultless and holy standard, you will always come up short. We will always see in Jesus a perfection we cannot have in this life. You could blame it on the mirror. After all, we've all been in a funhouse or a hall of mirrors where the mirrors are curved and distorted, where they make us look skinny or huge, squat or gigantic. We could say that Jesus isn't a fair mirror. Even worse, we could claim that the mirror is cracked, that Jesus wasn't sinless, that it's just not possible that He could be our standard for what a perfect human life should be. Sooner or later, you will turn away from that mirror that is Jesus.

But if we look at Jesus and study Him rather than ourselves, everything changes. When we look at Jesus for Himself, we see the beauty of His love for us. We see how much He cares for us – coming not only to be with us but giving up His very life for us. We see His kindness, His tenderness, His joy, His kindness. The more we gaze into Him deeply and forget about ourselves, the more we reflect Him. The more we show Him to the world. The more His features become our own. God corrects the flaws and imperfections in us and uses them to highlight His work in our lives.

Don't look away from Jesus. Look straight at Him. At first, it will be painful as you see what sin has done to you. But the longer you look, the more you will see Him smiling back at you, and the more you will want to be *His* mirror image.

Final thought for the day: *trust Jesus without prejudice*. When Jesus says a prophet is only without honor in his hometown and his own household, He says what prophets have said throughout the centuries. When we think we know someone well, we're often disappointed when they surprise us, especially if they point out our flaws. We've already judged who they are and what we can expect from them. We become prejudiced by what we think we know.

This week in the news, a woman living homeless for 16 years received \$100,000 this week from Social Security. She had gone to DC many years ago to try and sort out Social Security's errors and ran out of money. Most people thought she was crazy. She wasn't. The three briefcases she carried around on the streets contained all the paperwork that proved her story. She got someone to listen to her, and as it turns out, \$100,000 is only the first payment of many. Our prejudice would lead us to think she was nuts. Yet now she has the last laugh.

We often think that we know all we need to know about Jesus. If we've been in church much, we know the story of His life, death, and resurrection. We may have read the Bible and know how God's plan of redemption unfolded over the centuries. Yet we see it all through the lenses of our own culture and prejudices, distorting who Jesus really is.

American Christianity has been distorted by our own self-centeredness. You won't find promises of health and wealth in the Bible. You won't find a "sinner's prayer" in the Bible you must pray in order to become a Christian. The Bible does tell us that Jesus ministered to the sick and oppressed, setting an example for us, though we often forget that. We forget that Jesus' harshest words were not for the prostitutes and tax collectors who came to Him for forgiveness but the religious people who thought they had their lives together.

In the same manner, our culture is prejudiced against Jesus for its own reasons. Some won't believe in Christ because they think science has all the answers. They haven't seen proof of a miracle, so they can't believe Jesus does the miraculous, not realizing that life itself is a miracle beyond imagination. Whether you're deep in the Bible or an atheist, you come to Jesus through a colored lens.

My encouragement to you today is to know that Jesus loves you. He stands at the door of your life and knocks, waiting for your invitation to enter. He will comfort you, encourage you, challenge you, and discipline you. Don't be prejudiced by what you think you know about Jesus like the people of Nazareth were.

When you are convicted of a sin, don't reject Him because everyone else sins, too; repent! When you are challenged to be merciful or to pursue justice on someone else's behalf, don't shrink away from it because you thought Jesus wouldn't ask you to do those things. Scripture tells us He will. Be righteous and follow Jesus' commands! If you suffer rather than prosper in this life, don't let modern American thoughts about what you should receive from Jesus prejudice you against Jesus. You will learn so much about Him as you follow Him. Don't let your expectations get in the way of heading where He leads.

Jesus did not do many miracles in Nazareth because the people didn't want them. They didn't believe, so they didn't come to Him. But some did, and those who did went away changed by His healing hand and miraculous touch. Believe in Him and trust Him today, follow along His path, and you will know His hand on your life as well.

ⁱ Jamieson, R., Fausset, A. R., & Brown, D. (1997). *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 45). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.