

Jesus, An Offence to the Familiar

Matthew 13:53-58

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Introduction:

Today we come to a new section in Matthew's Gospel.

- Jesus has been in Capernaum for about year, but He is leaving to return now more.
 - The people of that city had the privilege of hearing His preaching and beholding His works in their streets...
 - But their response was not what it ought to have been...
 - They heard His voice, but they hardened their hearts.
 - Very few believed.

As we now trace our Lord's steps at the end of chapter 13 and through chapter 14,

- we find Him among various groups of people in various situations.
- And as we do, we learn what He is among us.

In our text for today, we find Him returning for a visit to the town where He grew up...

- The village of Nazareth.
 - Nazareth was a small, backwards sort of a place.
 - You might have expected the people there to be quite pleased to have a man who had risen to fame in their midst!
- Perhaps they would have been if Jesus had not infuriated them a year earlier.
 - Luke gives an account of this earlier visit in chapter 4 of his gospel.
 - He shows how Jesus stood up to read the Scripture and turned to the place in Isaiah where it speaks clearly about the Messiah...
 - Then Jesus declares to them that He is that Messiah.
 - But it seems that He has discerned a spirit in them that desired the fame and notoriety that would come to their village from being the home town of the Messiah than the saving of grace of God.
 - Therefore, He incenses them by telling them plainly that He will not be centring His ministry in Nazareth, but rather in Capernaum.
- In Luke 4:23, we are told that He had said to them:
 - "You will surely say this proverb to Me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in Your country.'"

- He went on to illustrate how Elijah went to a widow in Zarephath during the drought even though there were many widows in Israel that He might have gone to...
- And how Elisha cured a leper in Syria though there were many lepers in Israel he might have cured...
- He was telling them that because of their attitude, His merciful works would be performed elsewhere.
 - He assured them that He would not be subject to their demands.
- The home folks were so incensed by these words that they tried to push the Lord off the edge of a cliff that was on the outskirts of their village!
 - Jesus left them and went down to Capernaum.
- At the end of Matthew 13, Jesus is leaving Capernaum and returning to Nazareth for a visit.
 - It is about a year later, so the heated rage of the people has had a chance to cool down.
 - Jesus has become well known all over Galilee because of His preaching and His mighty works.
 - How will the citizens of Nazareth receive Him this time?
 - How will those who were so familiar with our Lord regard Him?

Well, our text shows us that they struggled greatly with Him.

- They knew Him too well!
 - They had seen Him grow up in their town...
 - They had known him in the Carpenter's shop...
 - They knew His family, His brothers and sisters that had come from the same womb...
 - How could it be that He was anything more than the rest of them?
 - How could it be that He was a prophet?
 - He had no special training or privileges—he was the carpenter's son.
 - This was the struggle the people of Nazareth had with our Lord...

But I believe the struggle at Nazareth about Jesus is really much bigger than Nazareth.

- We all share in this struggle...
 - We are all hometown folks who are familiar with Jesus...
 - What do I mean by that?

- I mean that our Lord Jesus has come and made His home in a human flesh... in our flesh.
 - He is bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh...
 - He has come in our nature and we know it.
 - He is truly one of us.
- Throughout the ages, the humanity of our Lord has been one of the most difficult things for the world to deal with whenever it has met Jesus.
- It seems impossible for us to think that the Son of God could come (or would come) in human flesh!
 - To the carnal mind,
 - if Jesus is one of us He cannot be God—at least not fully...
 - and if He **is** fully God, He cannot really be one of us (fully human).
 - This was a problem in the early church—
 - On the one hand,
 - there were the Gnostics who denied that Jesus had truly come in the flesh—
 - they denied what the people of Nazareth were sure of ...
 - In their minds, if He was fully God, He could not be fully human.
 - On the other hand,
 - there were the Arians who denied that Jesus was fully God—
 - in their minds, if He was fully human, He could not be fully God.
- But don't think this problem with humanity of Christ has gone away.
 - A survey conducted a couple of years ago found that the vast majority of Protestant leaders today deny that Jesus Christ was without sin!
 - They know that He was truly one of us,
 - and because of this, they cannot accept His divinity.
- And don't think we are immune to this struggle at Covenant Reformed!
 - We may have a better Creed—
 - we may freely confess that Jesus is truly and fully human and at the same time truly and fully God—
 - But we still struggle with pitting the deity and humanity of our Lord against one another—

- This is this prevailing tendency to trump aspects of His deity because of His humanity
 - and to trump aspects of His humanity because of His deity.
- We struggle:
 - How can it be that the One who weeps for us also judges us?
 - Can it really be that the one who wept in the Garden of Gethsemane under the terror of God's wrath...
 - is the same One who will come at the last day with that same wrath to execute vengeance on all His enemies?
 - Can it really be that the One who makes widows widows and orphans orphans is that same one that also defends them and executes justice in their behalf?
 - Yes it is true!

TRANS> My friends, this passage teaches you that

I. If you truly encounter Jesus, you will be astonished at Him!

A. This what happened to the people of Nazareth.

- Verse 54 says:
 - And when He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, "Where did this *Man* get this wisdom and *these* mighty works?"
- 1. The word translated "**astonished**" here is one we ran into when we were studying the Sermon on the Mount.
 - After Jesus finished that sermon, we were told in Matthew 7:28 that the people were **astonished** at His teaching.
 - The word in the original is rather difficult to translate into English.
 - It means to be "struck out of ones self..."
 - It means that you have encountered something so striking that you are blown away by it.
 - It puts you out of your wits or knocks you out of your senses.
 - It is a very strong word.
- 2. Verse 54 says the Nazarenes were blown away by two things:
 - a. The wisdom of His words and the power of His works.

1) Truly He spoke as no man every spoke! His words were powerful and beyond refutation!

- He spoke with perfect wisdom on every subject pertaining to life and godliness.
- His words had a way of striking their mark so that the hearers knew that God had spoken.

2) And there were His mighty works that were so well known...

- He was able to performed many wonders—
 - cleansing lepers,
 - healing the sick,
 - raising the dead—
 - and many other such things.

b. The people of Nazareth were blown away by all this!

- They, of all people, knew that Jesus had grown up like every other boy!
- They had seen Him work in His father's carpentry shop.
- They knew His brothers and sisters.
 - How could it be that He was doing all these great works?

c. It was all so very ordinary, and yet His teaching and His works were clearly not so ordinary...

- It truly astonished them.

B. And I say, if you have encountered Jesus, you will also be blown away by His words and works.

1. You will be blown away because here is a man that lived among us and walked in our streets and breathed our air and drank our water and ate our food—

- a man who was truly one of us—
 - and yet a man to whom things are attributed that could only belong to deity!

2. Here is the man whose word we read when we read the Bible!

a. You cannot read this book or hear it expounded and not be struck by its majesty and purity—

- by the consent of all the parts and the scope of the whole which is to give all glory to God.
 - by its light and power to convince and convert sinners and to comfort and build up believers in holiness unto salvation.

- We are struck because it is word of God and it comes to us with all the marks that it is divine.
 - You can try to suppress the uniqueness of this book,
 - but you cannot deny that it has transformed the lives of millions...
 - and that it comes to you with a forcefulness that no other book has.
 - Like Jesus Himself, His words are very human, yet they are purely divine.
- b. In the word of Christ, we are told things that no human could have ever dreamed up!
 - You may not always like what you hear,
 - but you are not able to resist the wisdom by which Christ speaks in this book.
 - You are told here how the world was formed,
 - how mankind fell into sin,
 - how God established a covenant with His elect to redeem them,
 - and how Jesus came and carried out that work.
 - He speaks to you here with words that are very ordinary,
 - yet in such a way that transcends human wisdom and ability.
 - Humanity and deity are brought together without diminishing either!

TRANS> And not only are we blown way when we hear the word that this man speaks...

3. We are blown away when we learn of the works that this man does among us!
 - a. You are told of the things the people of Nazareth saw—how he cleansed lepers and gave sight to the blind and raised the dead...
 - but that is not all!
 - b. You are told that all things were created by Him and for Him,
 - And that He is the One who is coming to judge the living and the dead at the end of the age!
 - How could all this be attributed to one who came in our own flesh?
 - c. You are told how He paid the penalty for the sin of the world by His death on the cross...
 - How God the Father accepted that payment for us!
 - Surely a penalty that no man could ever pay—yet Jesus paid it all!

- d. You are told how He gives the Holy Spirit to impart new life to sinners
 - How He breaks the hardest heart and convinces it of sin...
 - How He draws sinners in to be His disciples and keeps them to the end—
 - sinners who were completely lost and helpless—dead in trespasses and sins!

TRANS> Every human being is astonished when he truly learns about Jesus!

- How could it be that a man should speak as this man speaks!
- How could it be that a man should do such mighty works as are ascribed to this man!
 - If He is truly bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh,
 - how can this be?

II. O be astonished indeed, but do not be offended!

A. It is very natural for you to be offended with Jesus because He is flesh.

1. Verse 57 tells us that the people of Nazareth were offended at Him.
 - a. They were offended because they could not understand how He had acquired all His wisdom and power...
 - It was really quite natural for them to be envious of Him.
 - b. “Who does He think He is?”
 - “He is no different than us!”
 - “Who made Him a ruler over us?”
 - “Who made Him a judge?”
 - “Who made Him to be the source of all wisdom?”
 - “How is that He has come by all this power?”
 - “Aren’t we as good as He is? Don’t we know as much as He knows?”
 - c. Such envy is natural,
 - and by that, I don’t mean good or right...
 - Some people think that when something is natural, it is good,
 - but when we understand that we are by nature sinners,
 - than our natural and normal response is not good but evil...
 - Our natural response to the man Jesus is to envy Him because we are naturally corrupt.
 - God made us upright, but we have fallen into sin.

2. Envy goes very deep with us.
 - a. At the bottom, we are envious of God Himself!
 - Satan stirred up envy in us in the Garden.
 - He said, “Why should God be the One who calls all the shots?”
 - “You are able to make your own way.”
 - “You don’t need Him to tell what to do!”
 - “You have wisdom in yourself and you can make a better life without Him...”
 - “You will not die if you exercise your independence—
 - you will live to the very fullest!”
 - “You shall be as God!”

TRANS> What folly came from the lips of that deceitful serpent!

- b. But how much greater was the folly of that man and that woman who listened to him!
 - How could it be that a creature who must have air to breathe and food to eat and water to drink—
 - a creature who has no existence apart from the blessing of God—
 - should attempt to live without God?
 - c. This envy toward our Maker is the problem of the human race at the bottom...
 - We resent the fact that God is the Creator and we are the creature.
 - We feel entitled to His place and we do not want to worship Him or obey Him.
 - You may claim that you don’t mind,
 - but just let God call you do something you don’t want to do or forbid you to do something you crave and you will see this envy!
 - “Who are you to tell me what to do?”
 - Envy goes very deep with us.
3. And because envy goes very deep with us, it is not surprising that if God should come into the world in the form of man—
 - we should despise Him and say,
 - “Who are you?”

- even though He should have all the marks of deity before our eyes and astonish us with His word and works!
- We may admire Him,
 - and we may even aspire to be like Him...
 - but we will not give Him the honour that is His due because He is like us.

TRANS> But you see, here is the truth of all...

B. When Jesus came into the world, people treated Him just the way they treat God.

1. None of you ought to suppose that you would treat Jesus any differently than you treat Him now.
 - a. The way you respond to His word each day is the way you would respond to Him if He were here speaking it to you in the flesh.
 - 1) Are you cold to His word, not very interested in hearing it?
 - Then you would be just as cold and uninterested if you had met Him.
 - 2) Are you resistant to certain things that are written—do you ignore certain parts because you don't like them?
 - Then you can be sure that you would deal with Jesus in the same way because He too would say things you don't like.
 - If you resist ministers and elders when they speak the word of God to you in Christ's name, you would resist Christ in exactly the same way.
 - 3) Do not flatter yourself and say,
 - "Oh but I would be different if Jesus were here in the flesh."
 - You would not.
 - You would treat Him the very same way you treat Him now.
 - He is nearer to us now than He was to the disciples when He was here in the flesh...
 - He has given us His Spirit and the Spirit works through the ministry of the Word and sacrament.
 - What you do with these you would do with Him.
 - b. Likewise, the way you respond to His works today is just the way you would respond to His works if He were here in the flesh.
 - 1) If you rejoice in His saving work and are eager to bring others to share in it today,
 - you would have done the same when Jesus was here.

- But if you have little regard for His work,
 - you would have little regard for it if He were here in the flesh.
- 2) If you thank Him and praise Him for making water to fall out of the sky and food to grow up out of the ground,
- You would have been the one of the ten lepers who came to thank Him for cleansing his leprosy...
 - If you are filled with deep gratitude for His saving mercy and give true thanksgiving to Him for it,
 - You would have thanked Him for healing your child when He was on the earth.
- 3) But if you are offended with Him and say,
- “I do not need Him always about to pardon me and to change me.”
 - “I am okay the way I am.”
 - “I am tired of hearing about His saving work all the time—I just want to get on with serving God.”
 - If you say that about Him, you can be sure that you would have been offended with Him when He came.
 - Remember that **most** of His people were offended!
 - He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.
 - The people of Nazareth show us what we are like.
2. And oh what irrelevant excuses such people come up with!
- a. Look at the people of Nazareth!
- Here they are astonished at His word and His works, and instead of focusing on that and saying as Nicodemus did,
 - “We know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one could do the works you do unless God is with Him...”
 - instead of saying that, they say,
 - “Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all here with us? Where did this man get all these things?”
 - What does all that have to do with anything?
 - This is no proof that God is not with Him, but quite the contrary!
 - They knew He had not gone to school and learned all these things at the feet of some Rabbi!

- They knew his simple life in their simple town!
- They should have been all the more convinced that He was a teacher who had come from God!
 - Where indeed did He get all these abilities!
- But instead of focusing on the marks of His deity that had astonished them, they focus on the proof of His humanity that they might reject Him!
 - They assume that if He is one of them,
 - He cannot possibly be connected with divinity.

b. What foolish excuses you hear today!

1) John MacArthur comments:

- “It is tragic that small issues can be used as great excuses for not believing. The people of Nazareth were like people throughout the history of the church who can find every foolish reason to justify their rejection of the gospel. They don’t like the attitude of the one who witnesses to them; they think most church people are hypocrites; they think the preacher is too loud or too soft, too stuffy or too overbearing; and the services are too formal or too informal. They are offended at the slightest things Christians do and construe the insignificant as being all-important. They put one smoke screen after another to excuse their unwillingness to believe the clear and demanding claims and promises of Christ.”

2) The marvellous thing is not the perfections of the church, but that Jesus is the Saviour of such a church!

- The marvellous thing is not the majestic bearing of Jesus when He came to the earth to redeem us,
 - but His lowly birth and humbleness of life.
- This should not make you stumble,
 - but cause you to praise Him all the more.

C. The problem the world has with Christ is really a problem with God.

1. In the carnal mind,

- God cannot be both near to us and high above us at the same time.
 - If He is transcendent and majestic, He has to be remote and out of touch!
 - If He is near to us and accessible, He has to be like us.

2. And so the carnal mind has no room for an incarnate God.

- a. If He comes in our flesh,
 - He must be at least partially divested of His deity.
 - 1) If He is our judge who appeared in flames of fire on Mount Sinai,
 - He cannot be our friend who wept over Jerusalem because it would not repent.
 - 2) If He is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah who comes from the battle with blood stained garments,
 - He cannot be the Lamb who is silent before the slaughter and who reviles not again when He is reviled.
- b. But the carnal mind is terrible mistaken!
 - The people of Nazareth were certainly right about one thing—
 - Jesus Christ did indeed come in our flesh...
 - And they right about another—
 - He spoke words and did works that were astonishing!
 - But they were dead wrong to be offended at Him because of this!
 - They should have worshipped Him!
 - Their offense with Jesus ruined them!

III. And if you are offended with Him because of His humanity, it will ruin you too!

- Look at what our text shows you about this...
- A. First, if you are offended with Jesus,
 - it will keep you from honouring Him as you should!
 - 1. Jesus declares concerning Himself in verse 57 that:
 - “a prophet is not without honour except in His own country and in his own house.”
 - a. If you are offended because Jesus clothed Himself with our flesh,
 - you will not honour Him as you should.
 - You will not give Him the worship that is His due as the Son of God.
 - b. Clearly in saying this about Himself, Jesus was showing that He was entitled to the honour of a prophet...
 - But of course, He was entitled to much more than that.

- In the gospel of John we are told that on one occasion He said that:
 - “all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father.”
 - And to this He added:
 - “He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.”
 - He was claiming all the honour that is due to deity!
- c. Though He came in our flesh, He is equal with the Father in glory and honour.
 - He is the One who in fact shows us what the Father is like so that we can know the Father and worship Him...
 - Jesus is the One who reveals the transcendence of God and the nearness of God to us at the same time...
 - and corresponding to that,
 - the wrath of God and the love of God.
- 2. But in our idolatry, we want to pit these against one another and this keeps us from properly honouring the Son in our worship.
 - a. In the middle ages, the wrath and judgement of God was recognised but to the exclusion of the mercy and love of God.
 - It was a day of a thousand mediators—
 - People knew that Christ was God, and because God, they thought Him to be unapproachable.
 - Therefore, they approached Him through Angels and departed Saints and the virgin Mary and through all sorts and idolatrous ceremonies.
 - They had priests to intercede for them and offer the sacrifice of Christ for them because they felt that Christ Himself was too far removed.
 - They had no comfort because their salvation was dependent upon men.
 - They believed that they must go through years Purgatory before they could enjoy Heaven.

TRANS> You see how that even though they acknowledged Christ as divine,

- they did not really accept Him as a man who could sympathise with us in our infirmities.
 - They did not believe that God is a God that draws near to sinners to save them.
- b. But today, for the most part, you have the opposite error—
 - the error of Jesus’ hometown folks at Nazareth.

- 1) Today, we are quite familiar with Jesus.
 - We have familiarity with Him and gladly accept Him as one of us,
 - but we do not regard Him as holy and to be revered!
 - As I mentioned before, most protestant leaders believe that Jesus sinned.
 - We know Him as the Lamb who died in meekness,
 - but we do not know Him as the Lion who crushes all His adversaries with bloody vengeance.
 - We know Him as the One who helps us clean up after the storm,
 - but we do not know Him as the One who sent the storm...
 - Who rides and the clouds as His chariot and sits above the flood.

- 2) It is sad because we have lost the whole sense of the numinous.
 - We don't know what it means to take off our shoes on holy ground!
 - The idea of divine greatness that makes us shudder to the bone and stand in awe before Him is lost on us!
 - The idea of holiness that makes it mean something very special that we can stand before Him and yet live!
 - The knowledge that you are invited into the presence of the one that in justice would burn you to a crisp if not for His grace in Jesus!
 - Our worship has become light and frivolous instead of reverent and joyful...
 - casual and familiar instead of awesome and holy.
 - Instead of approaching our God as a God forgives sins at the high price of Jesus' death,
 - We approach Him as a God who is not all that bothered by sin.
 - As a God that just accepts us the way we are!
 - As the guy who grew up in our hometown!

- c. And so you see that whether you trump God's approachability because of a misguided reverence for Him,
 - or if you trump His reverence because of a misguided approachability...

- 1) You do not honour the Son as He deserves to be honoured.

- And you do not honour God as He deserves to be honoured.
- You are not to stand off as if He has not come near to us to save us...
- Nor are you to come before Him as if He is no different than us!

2) And if I might add to this, what you worship also affects what you live.

- Parents who stumble because of the humanity of Christ do not represent Christ well to their children.
 - If they see His divinity to the exclusion of his humanity,
 - they will be harsh, overbearing, and unapproachable with their children...
 - They are like Sinai without Gethsemane.
 - They are judges, but they have no tears and intercession.
- On the other hand, if they take away from his deity because he has come near to us in our flesh,
 - Then they do not exercise loving authority over their children.
 - They do not understand what it means to have their children honour them and respect them as parents...
 - They are friends, but they do not know how to command their children in the way of the Lord.
 - This is the error that is so common in our day!
 - Of course this reaches into all sorts of other relationships besides parenting...
 - If effects elders and magistrates and employers and every other relationship.
 - You neither honour the Son in your worship nor in your imitation of Him because you do not really know the Son.

TRANS> And just as this idolatry that cannot have an incarnate God keeps you from honouring the Son as you should,

- So also...

B. This same idolatry keeps you from obtaining His salvation!

1. Verse 58 tells us that Jesus did not do many mighty works in Nazareth because of their unbelief.
 - a. These people were too filled with envy to come to Christ for help.

- Their envy kept them from bringing their sick and their infirm to Him to be healed.
 - Though they knew He could do great things, they were so envious that they refused to come.
- b. Envy is one of the most destructive forces in the world to the person who has it!
- Where you might learn from those who are more excellent than you—
 - and where you might have them do for you what you cannot do for yourself...
 - Envy keeps you away.
 - It causes you deny that Jesus has what you need!
 - “He is just one of us—How can He give me what I need?”
- c. I tell you, to a people like that,
- our Saviour does not do many mighty works...
 - There were a few exceptions in Nazareth,
 - but as a general rule, He did not do many mighty works there because of their unbelief.
2. And now I would ask you, what are the mighty works that you need this Saviour to do?
- a. Is it not the mighty works that He came to do for sinners?
- It is not the work of redemption?
 - Is it not your justification by which He makes you righteous by imputing to you His own righteousness that He obtained for sinners?
 - Is it not your sanctification by which He brings you out of sin and renews you into the image of God?
 - Is it not the resurrection of your body at the last day by which you are made immortal to live forever in the comfortable presence of God?
 - Is it not all these same works for your children whom you are called to bring to Jesus for His saving mercy?
- b. Do not let unbelief keep you from these mighty works!
- 1) Jesus Christ has what you need!
- He is not a sinner, but the Saviour of sinners!
 - He is not weak and powerless just because He came in our flesh—But mighty to save.

- 2) Do not make peace with your sin and misery, make peace with this Saviour!
- Do not be so proud as to say,
 - “What do I need of Him?”
 - “What does He have to offer me?”
 - “Is He not human flesh the same as the rest of us?”
 - There are many today who will have Him as a fine example of an ideal man whose example is to be followed,
 - but that is not enough!
 - They will not have Him as the God man who alone is able to save them!
 - They will follow Him, but they will not look to Him to do His mighty saving work for them...
 - And because they do not, Jesus does not do His mighty saving work!
 - What a pity that He should come among us with all that we need and that you should not come to Him to obtain it!
 - That you should be so proud that you are not willing to humble yourself and come to Him to do what you cannot do for yourself.
 - What great things might have happened at Nazareth if these people had not been so full of envy and pride!
 - And what great things might happen among us if we would put away our pride and come to Him for His mighty works.