

The Rejection of the Kingdom

Mark: The Gospel of the Kingdom

Mark 6:1-13

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We'll be continuing our study in the book of Mark and understanding a turn in the narrative from where Pastor Randy preached last week. We see here a differently distinct reaction to Jesus' ministry, and one that I believe has powerful implications for us here both personally and corporately as a body of Christ here today. So with that let's dive into Mark Chapter 6:1-13.

¹ He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household." ⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.) Let's pray together. Father God, as we are reminded today of Christ and his rejection, let us be encouraged by your word today to face the trials and the challenges of this life, to help us press forward for the sake of your glory, calling people to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ your Son. And it's in his name we pray these things. Amen.

Stephen Nichols, a contemporary church historian and perhaps one of my favorite people to listen to when it comes to Christian biography, tells the story of a man who you might have heard of named John Gresham Machen. Machen was the founder of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, the denomination that we are currently a part of. And maybe some of you might be familiar with this story, but for those who aren't, let me give you Stephen Nichols's take on his background in this context. Machen was born in Baltimore in 1881. He was a graduate of Johns Hopkins University where he graduated with highest honors. He actually went to Franklin Street

Presbyterian Church, which is still in Baltimore today—you can actually visit it. And he eventually became a professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary at a time where Princeton was in the midst of defending orthodox, reformed Christianity. And he eventually found himself in the midst of a controversy, you see. As Nichols tells the tale, there was a time where a man by the name of Harry Fosdick had risen to prominence, as holding the title of the most popular pastor in America in the 1920's. He was heard around the country. He was the Joel Osteen of his era.

And when Fosdick—and I use that name [Osteen] appropriately—and when Fosdick would preach a sermon on Sunday morning, it was printed on the front page of The New York Times on Monday morning. That's how popular Fosdick was. People would be clamoring over his sermons and accept them as sort of the voice of Christianity for America at the time. But what people didn't really know about Fosdick, was that he was a modernist. Not sort of in the good hipster way, where the, you know, they were eating kale and enjoying a cold brew and all these different things. This was a modernist in a theological way. You see modernists in the age believed that you didn't really have to believe in the totality of the Bible to be a Christian. Now Fosdick would eventually reveal and show his cards, where he preached a sermon in 1922 called "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" Fosdick set up the idea that you could be a Christian without holding to five fundamentals. One, you don't have to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. Two, you don't really need to believe that Jesus was born of a virgin Mary. Three, you didn't really need to believe in the idea that God could perform and has performed miracles. Four, you don't need to believe that the atonement made by Christ in his death on the cross was necessary. And five, that it really doesn't matter if Christ is coming again, but rather that we just treat each other well. Fosdick said that you could deny every aspect of those five fundamentals and still be considered a Christian. I kid you not. Fosdick says in the sermon...He says, "If a man is a genuine modernist, his primary protest is not against holding these opinions—although he will protest against their being considered the fundamentals of Christianity. This is a free country, and anybody has a right to hold these opinions or any others if he is sincerely convinced of them."

As you can imagine, Machen has a slight problem with Fosdick. In a time in America where the growth of modernity in the fundamental truths of Scripture were seen as passé, for Machen to rebel against the man with the tenor and influence of Fosdick would be to face the fear of rejection from both the general public, as well as sympathizers to modernism within the Presbyterian church at the time. You see, the denomination that he was a part of, the Presbyterian Church in the United States [PCUSA]—not to be confused with the PCA, the Presbyterian Church of America—they're team Jesus. The Presbyterian Church of the United States was going through an identity crisis towards its own identity in the 1920's. They were founded on the principle that they would uphold the Word of God and the Westminster Confession. But now they were thinking of abandoning those principles to placate influential people like Fosdick, who held national sway. The thought in the PC USA at the time was that they could bring more people to Christ the [more] they actually stopped teaching that people needed to believe in Christ's divinity. I am not joking. So Machen here is faced with a choice. And this would begin a fifteen year journey for him of rejection, that would call him to resign his post as a professor of Princeton Seminary, to be kicked out of the denomination that he loved, to be slandered against that denomination for the founding of a new missions board that he created because the other missions board had ceased to proclaim the gospel. And finally, to

find himself at the end of his life dying on his deathbed with pneumonia in, of all places, Leith, North Dakota. As Stephen Nichols jokes, talking about Machen's life, he says why would anyone want to die in North Dakota? Don't worry, we'll get to that at the end of the sermon.

Now Machen's story here is one that points and reflects something that's incredibly important for us to understand about the Christian life. And it deals with a central theme of our text here today, and that is rejection—and you can tune me out, if this is all you get—rejection is a part of what it means to be received. More specifically, rejection is a part of what it means to be received by Christ into Christ's kingdom.

So let's leave the 1920's and 30' for a brief second, and let's go back in time to the 30's—the 30's AD. Jesus, in the first five chapters of Mark, is in the city of Capernaum. That's where all of this ministry that he's been doing, believe it or not, is roughly located around. He's doing ministry at the height of his popularity in Mark's narrative. He's teaching, he's healing, he's performing miracles. And as Pastor Randy preached on this last week, people from all over are sacrificing their reputation and their life to place their trust and faith in Christ and responding to him as more than just a mere man, but something much greater. The synagogue in Capernaum historically was noted as being sort of the synagogue of synagogues around the Sea of Galilee. It had beautiful architecture with arched gables and ornate carved stone figures, and it upheld all of the finest of Jewish tradition. And Jesus is invited to teach there. This is a city that's important to the Roman Empire. This is a city that's respected, right? This is a city where he's gained a lot of respect. And it's in precisely this moment Jesus decides to round up his disciples and head to Nazareth, his home town.

This is what Jesus does time and time again in his ministry. He gets to be insanely popular, and rather than exploiting it or manipulating it, he always just leaves to another town. Now in contrast to Capernaum, Nazareth is not a prominent city. It's twenty five miles away, it's in the hillside away from the Israelites, it's away from the main hub of, sort of, Jewish culture. You know, there's no Uber or Lyft access to get them there, so it's sort of a long walk. [Nazareth] was just a frontier town of Galilee. It's sort of the Radiator Springs of Israel, if you're familiar with the movie, "Cars." It's a synagogue that's not so prominent. On top of that, Jesus was born there. People know his story. They know his mom and dad. They know how he grew up his first thirty years of life. They hear that he goes to Capernaum, not as an ordained rabbi or a prominent teacher, but someone who used to make their couches and chairs and handle their blue collar work. And Nazareth, Jesus's hometown, is skeptical, to say the very least, of Jesus and his return. But, you know, they're going to still show him some northern mountain hillside hospitality. They're going to invite him to the synagogue and ask him to speak. But they're not coming as people who are willing and ready to receive the truth of the message of who he is and what he has done, but rather people who are ready to pounce on him and reject him at first glance. Now you'd have to ask yourself, what would cause these people to reject Jesus in his hometown? I mean, after all, he's the greatest thing that's ever happened in Nazareth since...ever. He's revered everywhere he goes. He's performed miracles and healings. And it would seem to imagine that Nazareth would give him some sort of a hero's welcome. So why is he so judged and hated in this passage?

There are several reasons the text highlights for us in verses 2 and 3, about the rejection from his home. Several reasons. Number One. They only see his humanity. Number One, they only

see his humanity. You see, in verses 2 and 3, we see that nothing about Jesus's life to the people of Nazareth—despite all evidence to the contrary—seems divine to them. They see Jesus more as a simple man. Maybe it's jealousy or maybe it's skepticism or maybe it's anger or it's worry, but for whatever reason one could find, Jesus is just a normal dude. A plain guy from their hometown who lived and breathed with them. Nothing more. I mean, surely these stories about Jesus couldn't possibly be true in their minds, because it just seemed too good to be true. He's just a man. And the problem with Nazareth is a problem of every generation. Every generation of the church has had to deal with people who think of Jesus as just a regular man. From adoptionism and Apollinarism in the early church, to Peter Abelard in the 12th century, to the Unitarians of the 18th century, to Mormons and other religions today, they all want to uplift Jesus's humanity to the destruction of who Jesus really is. Look at these verses here. They say, "Where did this man get these things?"

And this can creep in, even into the life of the church today, where we can fall prey to the over-emphasis of the human characteristics of Jesus that we find appealing, but without countering with the fullness of his divinity and his divine nature. We love it in the church when we hear of Christ as Brother, Christ who suffers, Christ who sympathizes with us and is there for us. And all of these are true and glorious and wonderful. But when we take these things to the degree that Jesus is just so casual and so ordinary—he's just an ordinary guy—it can lead us into dangerous assumptions about how Jesus views us, if Jesus is so casual in his humanity that this can lead us to saying that he would never ever call into question our lifestyle or demeanor or our posture of worship towards him or the sins that, maybe, so easily entangle us. Jesus only as a man simply stops being our Lord. He's not our King of the Kingdom. And instead, they say he's just a friend—not the Biz Markie song, but that song, what was it, that artist Israel Houghton, you know, "I am a friend of God" and he repeats that like five hundred billion times, right, in the song? Perhaps too much emphasis on the friendship of God, without really thinking about the posture of our friendship with him. The Nazareth over-emphasis causes great destruction to them, and it can cause great destruction to us today.

Which leads us to the second reason why they rejected him from his home. They doubted his divine nature. Look at verse 2 closely. "Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works be done by his hands?" On attack right now is the fact that Jesus could not have possibly had any sort of attributable nature of the divine. They come so close by asking the question where does this come from, but not so close that they actually believe in him as God. In the book of Luke, Luke expands on this narrative a little bit more, and they see that. . . the people Nazareth actually ask Jesus to perform miracles, like some sort of parlor trick magician. They probably reason, you know, there's better explanations to say how Jesus healed Jairus's daughter, how Jesus healed the woman with the blood discharge, the man with the demon. Jesus is just an elaborate trickster. And we at Nazareth—as long as we can get him to do something—we can figure him out. He is not a god to be worshiped.

But notice the difference here between the Nazareths asking for Jesus to perform miracles, asking him to prove himself, versus the people that we heard about last week in Randy's sermon. The people in last week's sermon gave up everything. They responded in faith before they ever even go to Jesus and ask for healing. The people of Nazareth want a sign first, before they believe. This isn't certainly the first or the last time a prophet has been put on trial to demonstrate his power before people believe. But the people in Nazareth need to be reminded

that this isn't the first time that people are rebuked for this kind of posture of faith. The Nazareth people should have known their Old Testament, about the Old Testament prophets. Jesus himself saves his strongest words for people like this in Matthew Chapter 16, where the Pharisees and the Sadducees are asking for a miracle to be performed. It's tied directly to their lack of faith and their inevitable destruction in judgment. The divinity of Christ is the biggest objection that [Jesus] faces in his lifetime, and it is probably the biggest challenge we face in our world today. A new atheist, by the name of Michael Shermer, states in this popular argument against Christianity, he says this. "Most people treat the God question separate from all other claims. They are right to do so, as long as the particular claim in question cannot even in principle be examined by science. But what might that include? Most religious claims are testable, such as prayer positively influencing healing. In this case, controlled experiments today show no difference between prayed for and not prayed for patients. And beyond such controlled research, why does God only seem to heal the illnesses that often go away on their own?" And then he says this. "What would compel me to believe would be something unequivocal, such as an amputee grew a new limb. Amphibians can do it. Surely an omnipotent deity could do it."

Now, what I would ask Michael Shermer, and this is the question that's raised for us here today: Does God need to act on our terms when we demand them to showcase that he is God? Does that even constitute something that we can hold the word faith in? See, that presupposes an understanding that all truth should only be found in what is repeatable, testable, and experimental. But to do so would strip away the very fabric of the greatest questions in life that we face. Apologist David Wolpe in response to Shermer says in this brilliant quote, and he says this to Shermer in response to this argument. He says, "Why do you wake up in the morning? Who do you choose to love? Why does love matter? These aren't scientific questions, but you live your life by these questions. You live it by faith." Wolpe here reminds us that faith in the divine, faith in Christ's divinity speaks at the heart of the very nature of the soul, the very thing that motivates and drives us in all understanding. That we are moved by our convictions, not simply because of what we can tangibly sense—as the people Nazareth were looking for—as though we were nothing more than sort of deterministic robots searching for the next program. But we are motivated by things that are in many ways unexplainable by natural laws. We're moved by poetry. We appreciate art. We take more photos than as a society that was probably responsible. We do this...why? It isn't because of scientific reasons. Because it's something that speaks to more of the soul and what we believe, what we're convicted by, by our faith.

And this is exactly what the Nazareth people neglect. What should be screaming to the people of Nazareth is that the presence of Jesus, the authority of his teaching, the miraculous work of his hands—this is far beyond the need for physical evidence, but more of a spiritual recognition that it is only God himself that could do the things that Jesus is doing and saying. And by choosing only to focus on the physically tangible, they're living in a hypocrisy, that their own desires point to a divine being first, rather than the material.

And this leads us to the third rejection that Jesus was faced in his home. The third rejection of Jesus is that not only they saw him as a human, denied his divine nature, but they also rejected Jesus because of who Jesus was to them, and not who Jesus is. They say, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?" They take offense to him because of who he was, not who Jesus is. This demonstrates here that these are people who are not willing to accept Jesus other than how he left them, before his ministry

began. They remind Jesus: You were born of Mary. They don't even mention Joseph's name, for one of two reasons. Either Joseph is gone away and passed away at this point in the narrative, or as some commentators suggested, they wanted to remind Jesus you were born of an illegitimate means. They want to keep Jesus in the same place that they found him, limiting themselves to [him] only being a memory in their imagination, rather than seeing who he has really become.

Now as someone who has spent most of his life in the field of education, I always find this particular passage to be incredibly fascinating, because it points to the conflicting message of our culture and our society of the idea of potential. On one hand we tell our children to break through barriers, to not let others define you, and to continue to grow and believe in your dreams, and to forget the haters. And yet somehow when they grow up into adults, we tell them stay in your lane. Don't go beyond who you are. We often are dismissive towards different groups of people, and we often call different generations either the best/worst generation of all time—millennials, baby boomers, whatever. And to continue to think that our static impressions of people as they were leaves no room for growth. And this carries great danger when we start doing this in the realm of faith. This points to dangerous sin of our limits of human understandings to believe in the change of heart of the individual and the person. This is destructive everywhere that we do this, but especially when we do this in the context of Christianity. We limit people and we don't see them as a new creation of Christ. We don't see them as someone, as Paul promises, to be the one who will be perfected in their faith. Instead we limit them to what they can be and see them as. This is the source, by the way, of all racism, sexism, and any source where human dignity is devalued. This is the source of that: looking at someone as who they were and not who they are.

Just a funny story of how this plays out in my own personal life. Some of you know that I was a teacher in Howard County Public Schools for about three years. I went by the moniker Mr. Song and I taught band. It was brilliant. I thought it was my calling, right? Teaching music, last name 'Song.' Clearly God's called me to this. And I remember my first intern teaching opportunity. My teacher was sort of walking me around the school, just showing me all the different classrooms, and we walked by the second and third grade wing. And there were these two, you know, innocent—like, you know—first and second graders, I think, around that time and they look at me. And this was a situation where, you know, there were not many Asian Americans around in that school environment. And so they look at me and they sort of turn their head, and then one of them goes, "Who is that?" Right? And then one of them goes, "I know who that is!" In the back of my mind I'm thinking to myself, oh, no, I look like some Asian guy that they know, and they just think we all look alike, and here we go again. And I'm going to have to explain to them that not all Asians are the same, and I'm just preparing the speech in my mind. And then one of the kids goes, "I know who that is." and his eyes light up and he looks at me with this excitement. He goes, "That's Jackie Chan!" Kids just start running towards me. The supervising teacher, he's so embarrassed. He runs me out of the room and he says I'm so sorry about that. And, you know, later he had to have the talk with them. But this is what happens, right? I mean, we generalize, we stereotype, we look at people and we assume what they are.

And that's something that we can do with Jesus. And something that we can do in grave error to the church. How often do we catch ourselves saying to other people in the body of Christ, well, this person can't possibly change. Even to those that we love the most: You'll always be like this. How much do we do this to each other? Church, if we are to see Jesus afresh as the

risen Son of God, perfect in holiness, awesome in power, wondrous in deed, the one whom we can place all of our trust and faith to make us more like him—how much more, then, shall we encourage and uplift and strengthen those around us who really are in Christ. Nazareth people could not see a coming Savior. They can only see him as a common nobody.

Now this rejection from home wasn't something that Jesus experienced by himself. There seems to be actually another reason that Jesus is visiting his hometown other than just going there to feel rejected. Note that there is another group of people with Jesus, traveling with him. It was his disciples, right there with him, witnessing this on a surface level, as it appeared, just seeing Jesus fail in his ministry. Mark ties the narrative in verses 1-6 to verses 7-13 in this passage. And you look at here, he's actually now, after witnessing this grand rejection, he sends them out. And Jesus is preparing them, you see, to face rejection from the world. Jesus takes this experience from Nazareth in the full view of his disciples to demonstrate to them the type of rejection and adversity that they will face in proclaiming the gospel message. And in preparing his disciples for rejection he gives them two things. He gives them authority and he gives them an exhortation. And here lies a refrain that would be a part of Jesus's sending of disciples in the world. This is something Jesus repeats over and over. That they would receive authority, not because of their own accord or their own power, but rather because of Christ himself. That their message would be effective because Christ was with them. Christ is granting the power of the Gospel that's proclaimed.

You see, this is what our good friend—well, maybe not our good friend—Harry Fosdick got wrong. We don't have the beg people to come to Jesus or try to appeal to all their modern sensibilities to make the gospel palatable. To do so is to apologize for the very message of salvation that we're trying to proclaim. We don't have to rewrite the book on Christianity for Christianity to be effective. That book has already been written. Instead, the mission of the disciples and our mission is the same that's been presented to every generation of the church. To proclaim the Gospel. To lift up Jesus Christ. To know that we have power behind it. Not because of the weight of my personality or our strengths or weaknesses or our inadequacies, even, but because the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged sword. That's the message has been proclaimed for two thousand years, and it's not going to stop now. That's what it means to proclaim the message of the Gospel that got some authority behind it—some oomph. Not because of our pedigree, but because of his.

He not only gives them authority, but he also gives them an exhortation. I see that Jesus is telling them, when he says. . . Jesus tells them to “take nothing for their journey.” You know, no tunics, no bread, no bag—all these different things. Jesus is asking them to trust that God will provide all the means for the message of the Gospel to be shared and spread. It certainly would've been entirely practical for them to prepare all the things, get all their ducks in a row. It certainly would have been practical for every missionary of every generation to ensure their safety of the mission field before they entered it. But ‘practical’ isn't always a response to our calling, is it. We need to live by faith, even for our most basic needs for travel, even when we doubt if the message is going to be effective. Why is Jesus so adamant about all of this? Because he knows that the end goal of the mission is not in rejection, but a reception into the kingdom. He knows that all of this is so that Jesus Christ—the life that he lives, all the rejection he faces is so that he could be sent to a cross, rejected and despised by men. Who would clean us from all of our sin, call us the children of God, make us co-heirs with Christ, to receive us into a glorious kingdom. At the core of Mark's message is one that points to Jesus' identity, that is

not just simply about Jesus, but also about a kingdom that is coming. A kingdom that is crowned, not with glorious crowns at first, but a crown of thorns, a crown of rejection. And this God who receives us into his kingdom is doing so on the basis of the pain and suffering that he goes through.

And I want you to think about this as we close. Jesus lived the perfect life that we should have lived. This is often called the active obedience of Christ, that Christ performed every action that we could not. His perfect obedience and all the experience in his life were exemplary, everything of what it means perfectly in the way that God commands. But do you catch that? In Christ's perfect, active, obedience, he faces rejection. That should be a great comfort to all of us here in this room, all of us who wonder about the hardships and the pains, and maybe even we think of family members and friends that have rejected us on the basis of our faith. To know that our great Savior in his perfect life also would face rejection.

Which leads us, as I close here real quickly—went a little long, I'm sorry—which leads us to Machen and his deathbed in North Dakota. You may be asking yourself why did Machen die in North Dakota. You see, after he had founded his new denomination there was rejection amongst many churches who initially joined the O.P.C., because they feel like they had made a mistake, maybe they should go back to the P.C. USA, and then perhaps they should come back to modernity. And he hears that a church in North Dakota is waffling and wavering on this issue. Now at the end of the term of his post at Westminster Theological Seminary, where he served as de facto president, he's done grading, he had done his radio show, he was preaching sermons left and right. He was he was exhausted and tired, and his friends were begging him not to go on that train to North Dakota. Let's imagine they must've reasoned something along the lines of it's North Dakota, just leave it be. But Machen's heart for the church got him on the train—he hated planes, he didn't want to fly—got on a train to go there to convince them to stay. And along the way there he contracted pneumonia, as he was preaching there. and he called Leif, North Dakota, his resting place. The last letter he sends out is to one of his good friends, John Murray. And in that letter he writes this quote. "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. There is no hope without it."

Christians in this room today, there may be some of you here today that are limping, physically and spiritually, to make it across the finish line of faith. The pain of rejection has hurt you so much, you just can't imagine moving forward. But if we are to take Jesus at His word here, we know that this is all in anticipation of being received into a kingdom that is much greater than any pain or strife or trial or worry that we could ever face in this life. Where we hear the words well done, well done, good and faithful servant. Where the sting of death will be no more, our victory is assured, and all the years of rejection will fade away into an eternity of bliss and joy and fellowship with our God forever. That is our great hope, and that's why we're going to share in this meal right now. So let's do it together. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that rejection is not the end, but the finality is that we will be received into a kingdom. And Lord, may that hope guide our every thought and step. May we see Jesus as who he really is: fully man, fully God. The perfect obedience in which we can place our surety and our trust and our faith and hope, even when everything around us says no way. And Lord, won't your Spirit guide us now as we partake of this meal together. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.