

Week 9: *Those Who Reject Jesus*

Hook



Main Point: Some reject Jesus out of misunderstanding, pride, or desire to hold onto power.

According to a 2023 survey, more than half of Americans ages 18 to 42 live in their hometowns.¹

Q: Do you live in or near your hometown? Why did you choose to stay or move?

Dallas-Fort Worth is hometown to many celebrities and professional athletes, including:

Dallas: Owen and Luke Wilson, Nick Jonas, Vanilla Ice

Fort Worth: Kirk Franklin, Bill Paxton, Kelly Clarkson

Prosper: Christopher Buescher, Matt Carpenter, Justin Forsett

Plano: Lance Armstrong, Anousheh Ansari, Jake Arrieta

Q: What makes your hometown unique?

Q: What struggles come with living in your hometown?

Transition: In today's lesson, Jesus encounters resistance in His hometown. Despite His incredible miracles and teaching, the people of Nazareth wouldn't believe.

RECAP: In our first lesson, we learned about the author, audience, genre and occasion of the Gospel of Mark. Gospels are not just stories, biographies or history books; they are proclamations of the Gospel, like sermons. Mark's focus on Jesus' actions more than His teaching propels us to consider how we will act in response.

In lessons 2 through 4, we saw that every part of Jesus' ministry pointed to His kingship as the Messiah they had been waiting for, but it was a different kind of kingdom than

they expected – a spiritual kingdom that is upside down from the kingdoms of this world.

In lessons 5 through 7, we saw Jesus' behaving differently from the typical religious leaders of His day and flipping their social systems upside down. Some people reacted positively to Him, and others reacted negatively, especially those who didn't want their world turned upside down, because the status quo was working in their favor.

In lesson 8, we saw Jesus perform three God-sized miracles, showing us His authority over all of creation, the supernatural, and even life and death. He was not only sent from God; He *is* God. In this lesson, we'll again see people's reactions to Him, this time all negative – those who rejected Him because He was too familiar, those who rejected His disciples when they came preaching repentance, and those who rejected Him because He was a threat to their power.

Week 9: *Those Who Reject Jesus*

Book

Main Point: Jesus has authority over all things – nature, the supernatural, even life and death.

Mark 6:1–6 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Jesus was rejected in His hometown.

Q: Why were the people of Nazareth surprised by Jesus' wisdom and miracles?

Q: What does Jesus' amazement at the people's unbelief teach us about Him?

Jesus had just done His greatest miracle to date, but He had strictly told them not to tell anyone about it. The “Messianic Secret” is a theme throughout the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus didn't always keep His identity secret; He went back and forth between concealing and revealing who He was because there was so much misunderstanding among the Jews about who the Messiah would be. He was trying to help them redefine their understanding of Messiah and reframe their expectations. When Jesus raised Jairus's daughter, He took only Peter, James, and John with Him and told everyone to keep it quiet. Then He went with all His disciples to His hometown of Nazareth, despite the tension with His biological family a few chapters before, when He told everyone that those who do the will of the Father are His true family (Mark 3:31–35).

On the Sabbath, He began to teach in the synagogue. It was common to ask a visiting rabbi to teach in the synagogues. They would have been proud to have visiting a hometown kid who had become a traveling rabbi. But they were astonished at His wisdom, which was well beyond anything they had seen. They had known Him since He was a boy. Where did He get this incredible wisdom and supernatural power to do miracles? This story gives us a glimpse into Jesus' childhood. Though He was God-made-flesh from the very beginning, for the first 30 years of His life, He lived like one of us.

Jesus kept His supernatural power so hidden that the people of His hometown were shocked to discover it. This is theologically important because it means Jesus really is a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, who was tempted in every way but did not sin (Hebrews 4:15). Despite being fully God and fully man, Jesus truly lived the human experience. And not just His childhood, but also growing into adulthood and living in obscurity for 30 years. Jesus knows what it is like to be a regular, everyday person. He knows the struggles and the joys. He has experienced it all.

Mark tells us that the people took offense at Jesus because they didn't understand how someone who was just a regular guy from their village suddenly was doing these amazing things and knew so much about Scripture. Jesus had shown incredible wisdom and understanding of God's Word at the temple when He was 12 (Luke 2:41–52). But apparently, He didn't show His knowledge as much in His hometown. He didn't become a disciple of the local rabbi in his later teen years, as the "best of the best" students typically did. He became a carpenter like His father (v. 3), which is what the average students would do. Though He had that knowledge, He didn't demonstrate it until His public ministry. They would have been shocked to suddenly hear this wisdom coming from Him and seeing these miracles.

When they became hostile toward Him, Jesus said it was typical for a prophet to be rejected in His hometown and by His own relatives. Mark said He couldn't do miracles there other than healing a few sick people because of their lack of belief. This doesn't mean Jesus' power was limited but that not as many people came to Him in faith. Jesus' miracles weren't like pagan magic tricks; they were about bringing people to faith and repentance. Jesus marveled at their unbelief, not that He was surprised by it, but He was disturbed. Like He mourned over Jerusalem, the city that should have known God better than anyone else but didn't recognize Jesus when He came and rejected Him as they had the prophets who came before Him.

Q: Give some examples of people today who think they already know Jesus but don't really get who He is? What are some misconceptions people have of Jesus?

Q: How can we let Jesus tell us who He is rather than let the world define Him for us?

Mark 6:7–13 [Read]

Talking Point 2: We're called to share the message; we're not responsible for the response.

Q: What did Jesus tell the disciples to take for their journey?

Q: What were the disciples supposed to do if a town would not receive them?

Q: Jesus commissioned the twelve disciples to take nothing; who did He want their trust and security to be in?

After Jesus was rejected in Nazareth, He sent His 12 disciples out on their own missionary journey. They were to go out in six pairs; it was customary in both Greek and Jewish culture to send messengers or heralds out by twos. By Jewish law, this also validated their message, because testimonies were reliable if given by two or three

witnesses (Deuteronomy 17:6). They were to take nothing for the journey except a staff for protection/walking, sandals and two tunics. They weren't to take any food or money because they were to rely on people's hospitality wherever they went. This demonstrated their trust that God would always provide what they needed. It also showed a complete commitment to their mission; they wouldn't be distracted by worldly things but focus completely on what they were doing for Jesus.

Hospitality was one of the most important values in ancient Jewish culture. It was a moral responsibility to house those who traveled through your town, to keep them safe and to provide food, lodging and whatever else they needed. In the ancient world, before hotels and quick transportation, travelers would be dependent on other people's hospitality. The Talmud said welcoming guests was "greater than welcoming the Divine Presence."² At the beginning of every meal, Jews recited a declaration of an open-door policy of hospitality – "Let all who are in need come and eat!"³ All Jews would have felt obligated to receive the disciples into their homes in hospitality, even if they didn't receive their message.

Their message was simple – repent and turn back to the Lord. At this point, they didn't yet have the full Gospel message because Jesus had not yet been crucified and resurrected. But the message of repentance would turn people's hearts back to God so they would be ready to receive the Gospel. This also gave the disciples practice for what they would later do throughout all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. The disciples had a successful practice round; they cast out many demons, healed many sick, and brought many back to the Lord.

Jesus told them that if any city would not receive them or listen to their message, to shake the dust from their feet when they left. This was a sign of ending fellowship. It was customary for Jews to shake the dust off their feet before they reentered Judea from a Gentile land so they wouldn't bring even any Gentile dust into their holy land.⁴ But Jesus said to do this to any town who rejected their message, including Jewish towns, treating them as if they were unclean, pagan cities. This small act was a beginning of redefining what it meant to be the people of God. It wasn't about Jew or Gentile. It wasn't about ethnicity, geography or background. It was about faith in the message and person of Jesus.

This passage doesn't mean we should only try once to share the Gospel message with people and if they don't accept it, to "shake the dust off our feet," meaning give up and leave them to be judged by God. This was a unique time in the Gospel story, which some call the "Limited Commission" as compared to the Great Commission they were given after His death and Resurrection to go into all the world to be His witnesses and make

disciples, even to the very ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19–20). Shaking the dust off wasn't about giving up on these towns. They later went again to witness to them with the full Gospel. It was about redefining what makes someone part of God's kingdom (faith, not ethnicity), not about giving up on witnessing to someone.

We should continue to witness to people, because we don't know if or when someone may repent and be saved, even on their death bed. We're not responsible for whether they accept our message. Only God causes the growth. But we are responsible for planting the seeds and watering them as much as we can (1 Corinthians 3:1–9). God calls us to go out into the highways and hedges and compel people to come in to the feast, that His house may be filled (Luke 14:23).

Q: Share some of your experiences with people rejecting the Gospel message. How did you respond to them? How can you continue to pursue without pushing people further away?

Mark 6:14–29 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Some people reject Jesus because He is a threat to their power.

Q: What were some people saying about Jesus?

Q: Why did Herodias have a grudge against John the Baptist?

Q: If John lost his life for following Jesus, what should we expect in our discipleship & commissioning from the Lord?

This story may seem confusing because it tells the story of something that happened earlier. The framework is that King Herod had heard about Jesus, and some people were saying He was John the Baptist come back to life. Others were saying He was Elijah or one of the other prophets of old. Herod was concerned because he was the one who had killed John the Baptist. He was worried that the prophet he had beheaded had returned to take revenge on him. Then the text goes back and tells the story of how Herod had killed John the Baptist.

This was Herod Antipas, the second husband of Herodias, the last of the Hasmonean line. The Hasmoneans had briefly ruled over Israel after the Maccabean Revolt (140–37 BC), but the Messiah would be of the line of David. When John the Baptist arrived on the scene, Antipas and Herodias were ruling Judea, and John publicly criticized them for breaking the law by Antipas's marrying his brother's wife while his brother was still alive (Leviticus 20:21).⁵ This wasn't just a moral issue; questioning the legality of their marriage could affect their claim to power in the eyes of the people. They were also

threatened by his preaching that Messiah was coming – the rightful heir to the throne, *a son of David*. John the Baptist was put in prison in Mark 1:14. Now we are coming back to what was going on with Antipas because Jesus had become well known, and now He was seen as a threat to Antipas and Herodias, too.

The text tells us the story. Herodias wanted to have John killed, but Antipas feared John because he knew he was a righteous and holy man. Antipas kept John safe and even listened to his teaching “gladly” (v. 20) but never repented. It wasn’t unusual for kings to keep wise men at court for cultural reasons, more for entertainment than for moral edification. On Antipas’s birthday, when Herodias’s daughter with Philip (Antipas’s stepdaughter and niece) danced for Antipas and his guests at his banquet, he offered to give her whatever she wanted, up to half his kingdom (though he didn’t really have the authority to do this; he was just a Roman vassal, not a real king). This shows us his lack of moral character. After taking his brother’s wife, he was now lusting after his stepdaughter/niece. It also shows Herodias’s lack of moral character, using her daughter as bait like this. At Herodias’s urging, Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist, and even though it upset Antipas, he couldn’t lose honor in front of his guests.

This all happened sometime between Mark 1:14 and here in Mark 6. Now Herod Antipas believed Jesus might be John the Baptist back from the dead, and he was worried about revenge. In the flow of the story in Mark, this emphasized what people were thinking about Jesus – He could be John the Baptist or Elijah or another prophet. Elijah never died; he was taken up into heaven, and the people expected him to return in the last days, before the day of the Lord, the final judgment. But it also shows us how Antipas and Herodias would be feeling about Jesus as a threat to their power. Whether He was the Messiah come to take back the throne for the line of David, John the Baptist come back to get revenge, or Elijah come to usher in the last days, none of these were good news for Antipas and Herodias.

The Pharisees and the Herodians (Jews who supported the Herod’s) had already been plotting how to kill Jesus (Mark 3:6). Now Antipas and Herodias were starting to feel threatened by Him as well. The fact that Herod could just cut off John the Baptist’s head without asking Pilate or any other Roman authority meant he could do the same or worse to Jesus for no reason other than his own whim. The danger to Jesus was quickly rising from both the religious and political leaders of Israel. While we may not personally know any kings or world leaders, we can still see the tendency in many people today not to want to give up power– business leaders, local politicians, community leaders, even some church leaders. Or even those with just a little bit of power, maybe over their friend group. The call to follow Christ is a call to lay down our crowns at the feet of

Jesus, to let go of our power in order to serve others and honor Him as king. There are also those who reject Jesus because, like Antipas and Herodias, they don't want to be called out for things they are doing that are wrong.

Q: Reflect on people today who may feel threatened by Jesus' message because they don't want to give up their power or change their way of life. How can you show them that the Gospel is good news, even for them?

Q: In what ways have you been unwilling to give up your power or self-control to follow Jesus completely as your king?

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Took

Main Point: Jesus has authority over all things – nature, the supernatural, even life and death.

Teacher, at the end of LifeGroup, share a story about someone with whom you've shared the Gospel and, up to this point, has rejected Jesus. Talk about your prayers for him or her, that God would soften that person's heart. Challenge your LifeGroup to consider someone in their life yet to accept the Gospel and invite your members to pray for these individuals.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Reflect on different reasons people reject Jesus and His message today. Maybe they don't really understand who He is. Maybe they've been given the wrong message. Maybe they don't want to follow Him because it would mean giving up control of their own lives. What are some other reasons people reject Jesus? How can we work to show people who Jesus really is and that the Gospel really is good news for everyone? Ask yourself these questions, "am I willing to serve God for nothing?" and "Is the eternal reward to come greater than any suffering I may face in this life?"

PRAY for those who have rejected Jesus up to this point, including people who think they know Him but really don't. Pray for their hearts to be softened to the message, for the eyes of their hearts to be enlightened, and for them to see the goodness of the Gospel message. Pray for the Lord to give you opportunity to show them with your life and tell them with your words just how good Jesus really is. Pray for God to equip His Church to be His witnesses and send workers for the harvest.

ACT: Share hospitality. Open your home this week to someone who is far from Jesus. You don't have to verbally share the Gospel with the person right away. Just show the person hospitality by welcoming him or her into your home, building relationship, and being a friend. If you're not quite ready to open your home, or he or she isn't comfortable with that, you could invite this friend to join you for coffee or dinner. That can also show hospitality. Pray before you meet with him or her and ask the Lord to guide your conversation.

¹ <https://www.lendingtree.com/home/mortgage/hometown-survey/>

² "The Jewish Value of Hospitality," My Jewish Learning -
<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/jewish-hospitality/>

³ Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit 20b

⁴ *ESV Study Bible* (Crossway, 2008).

Craig S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993).

⁵ See Lesson 3 for more details!