Mark Lesson 17 (2022)

**JESUS’ HOMETOWN PEOPLE REJECT HIM**

*(Subtitle: Familiarity Breeds Contempt)*

Mark 6:1-6a

Key Verse: 6:4

“Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives, and in his own home.’”

Jesus had given ample evidence through his Galilean ministry that he was more than a mere man. He demonstrated his divine power over nature, demons, sickness, and even death (4:35-5:43). Yet not everyone who had witnessed his miracles accepted him. The Jewish leaders rejected him mainly because of jealousy and greed. In today’s passage, it is surprising that even Jesus’ hometown people dismissed him, disrespecting him and showing contempt. Some of them were his old friends. Jesus told them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” Jesus could not do any miracles in his hometown because of their lack of faith. Today’s event is a short story containing not more than 6 verses. I used to think today’s story is irrelevant and that what Jesus said to them has nothing much to do with us because we are not from his hometown. Yet, I discovered that it contains a priceless lesson we should know and practice, ***“Familiarity breeds contempt.”*** This morning, let us think about how we can avoid blocking God’s mighty work and let God’s blessing overflow throughout our lives.

Look at verse 1. “Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.” According to the previous passage (5:21-43), Jesus had been in Capernaum, particularly at the house of Jairus, a synagogue ruler, where he raised his dead daughter. Capernaum was the headquarters of Jesus’ Galilean ministry, where he concentrated his ministry on preaching, teaching, and healing. One day, Jesus left Capernaum and went to his hometown, Nazareth, about 30 miles southwest of the Sea of Galilee. (Map#1/Pic#1)

According to the Gospel narratives, it might have been his second visit to his hometown during his ministry. His first visit to his hometown occurred at the beginning of his ministry. At that time, he went there alone (Lk. 4:16-31). When Jesus revealed his messianic identity, his hometown people disliked him saying that. They became furious and tried to throw him off the cliff. Jesus barely escaped (4:30). It must have been a traumatic experience. This time, he was accompanied by his twelve disciples. By this time, he had become exceedingly popular among the people throughout Galilee and surrounding areas, including Judea, and Jerusalem. At the same time, he also had become controversial among the orthodox Jewish community. Even though he had done anything but good by healing and preaching, the Jewish religious authority felt threatened by his presence and was looking for an opportunity to remove him in secret. As Jesus revisited his hometown, he knew the rumors about him being spread among his townspeople. Jesus needed much support from people in his hometown, especially his relatives, friends, and family members. But did Jesus think they would accept and support him this time? I do not think so. I am sure that he anticipated rejection. Then, why would he even bother to revisit them, taking his twelve disciples? We will find out soon.

Look at verse 2. “When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. ‘Where did this man get these things?’ they asked. ‘What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?’” It seems that Jesus could not go out and preach there until he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath. And the people’s response to his teaching was quite mixed. On the one hand, they were amazed at the powerful teaching. On the other hand, they were skeptical about him. They questioned the source of his outstanding knowledge, wisdom, spiritual power, and charisma. How would you feel to be there if you were in Jesus’ shoes? Extremely uncomfortable.

I am sure that Jesus’ hometown people had heard how Jewish religious leaders accused him of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebub (3:22). Unlike the Jewish leaders, the townspeople did not demonize Jesus. Still, they were reluctant to admit that Jesus’ outstanding knowledge, wisdom, and miracles were from God. They were suspicious of him. What was behind their reluctance and suspicion?

Look at verse 3. “‘Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brothers of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him.” Here, we see that the main reason for their reluctance was their familiarity with him. To their memory, Jesus was nothing but a carpenter who made their furniture and tools. Joseph Senior, Jesus’ father, died years ago, and was also a carpenter. Their carpentry shop was a family-run business in the town’s main street, like *“Wonderful Shoes and Shoe-Village.”*

They also knew that Jesus had siblings, at least 4 brothers and 2-3 sisters, living with them in the town. We also notice that the townspeople called him*, “Isn’t this Mary’s son,”* instead of calling him, *‘Isn’t this Joseph’s son?”* It was the customary practice among the Jews to use the father’s name, whether he was alive or dead. A man was called the son of his mother only when his father was unknown, meaning he was illegitimate. It was possible that rumors that Jesus might have been an illegitimate child could have circulated among the townspeople all those years. When they called Jesus, “Isn’t this Mary’s son?” it was derogatory and condescending. Based on their familiarity, they could not find any reason to see Jesus as anyone better than them. They humiliated and rejected Jesus right before his disciples and all congregation. Public humiliation is one of the hardest to endure.

How did Jesus respond to their stern rejection and public humiliation? Look at verse 4. “Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.’” Before getting into what Jesus said, let’s think about something briefly. It is surprising to see how Jesus responded to their rejection. Even though Jesus was God, he also was fully human, with emotions and pride. I am sure Jesus felt humiliated and hurt by their rude remarks and behaviors. Yet, Jesus did not get upset with them or overreact. He stayed calm and had unshakable confidence in himself. According to modern psychology, Jesus had a high level of Emotional Intelligence.

One day, my granddaughter, who is eight years old, was worried and asked, *“Grandpa, I don’t think people like me.”* What she was concerned about as a young and sensitive girl was understandable. So, I told her, *“Sophia, I like you and will love you forever, no matter what. But remember that you do not expect everyone to like you.”* While talking with her, reminded me of my growing up as the youngest son in the family. I received much love and attention from my parents and my older siblings. So, I automatically expected everyone to love and accept me just as I was. But when certain people didn’t like me, it bothered me. Somebody even bullied me. It was hard to take. The desire to be liked and accepted by everyone is nothing wrong, but it’s an unrealistic expectation. It’s true that *“Unrealistic expectation is a premeditated resentment.”*

Jesus was not liked by everyone either. Many people hated him. Yet, Jesus did not lose his cool. He remained confident in God and himself no matter what. (Pic#2) *Confidence is not, “they will like me.” Confidence instead is, “I’ll be fine if they don’t.”*

I am sure that Jesus was not surprised by their rejection. However, he replied to them with a proverbial statement, which everyone could understand, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” (4). Jesus said this not because he wanted to defend himself or speak ill of them. Instead, Jesus understood the limitation of human nature. The phrase ***“Familiarity breeds contempt”*** expresses a universal principle in all human societies and relationships.

What does *“familiarity breeds contempt”* mean? It means that close association with someone leads to losing respect for them. For example, we tend to take it for granted or be hostile toward those with whom we have a long history of knowing each other, like marriage relations, parent-child relations, friendships, partner relations, and sometimes our relationship with God. The list goes on and on.

I often see some married couples who could not stay together and live happily after their wedding because they developed familiarity that breeds contempt. After working in the same company or serving in the same church for many years, some people hate its name because they are too familiar with many negative things. It’s an unfortunate reality. What shall we do? We should break the pattern of our old habits based on the familiarity that breeds contempt. True happiness in life and relationship comes when we become a new creation. It is no wonder that Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” I know it’s very challenging.

Recently, a husband who has been married for 20 years told me he and his wife would celebrate their wedding anniversary this coming weekend. And they have also been reviewing their marriage vows individually and will exchange them at the party as if they are newly married. I was delighted to hear that they are renewing their relationship intentionally. We must continue all our relationships, whether marriage, friendship, parent-child, or partner relationships, and our relationship with God our Father. In other words, we should never allow our familiarity to breed contempt in any relationship. We need a lot of wisdom, patience, and will.

The people of Nazareth failed to recognize Jesus even as a prophet, a man from God, because they were too familiar with human Jesus. So, Jesus, by saying this familiar phrase. “A prophet is without honor except in his own town” implied that he was at least a prophet. Of course, he was more than a prophet. Yet, in saying that no prophet is accepted in his hometown, Jesus challenged his hometown people to examine and reexamine themselves for a reason behind their rejection. We are not sure how many people understood what Jesus said. It’s a high level of spirituality.

Look at verses 5-6a. “He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.” Jesus’ hometown peoples’ refusal to believe in him resulted in Jesus being unable to do many miracles among them. We also noticed that it said, “He could not do any miracle”, not “He would not do any miracle.” as if their unbelief disabled Jesus.

We acknowledge that God is all-powerful and omnipotent. There is nothing that God cannot do. We also believe that Jesus Christ was God in human flesh. So, we believe that Jesus was all-powerful. He calmed the storm, drove out demons, healed incurable diseases, and raised the dead. Yet, according to Mark’s comment, Jesus could not do any miracle in his hometown because something tied his mighty hand. What was it? It was the unbelief on the part of his townspeople.

Verse 6 states that Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. Sadly, the unbelief of the people of Jesus’ hometown excluded them from the dynamic flow of God’s blessing through Jesus. How tragic it was! Our lack of faith can limit God’s work in our personal lives, relationship, and beyond. Faith is not an option for our happiness. Faith is the answer. Faith is the spiritual Wi-fi that connects us to God personally. It’s an overly simplified statement. But it is true that if we turn on the spiritual Wi-fi, we can be connected and reconnected to the dynamic flow of God’s blessing, and our life cannot be renewed and revitalized. Some Christians complain that their life is so dry and tired. Why is it so? Faith isn’t just being religious. It’s a relationship and personal connection with God. Someone said, *“religion is for those who are afraid of hell and spirituality for those who have been in hell.”* Jesus said to his disciples in John 7:38, “Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.”

Let me close my sermon. Why would Jesus take his disciples with him when he visited his hometown even though he anticipated rejection? Jesus wanted his disciples to prepare themselves for a future encounter with rejection. Jesus showed an excellent example of how we can deal with rejection or the feeling of rejection. When his hometown people rejected him, he didn’t personally condemn them. Jesus knew that our finding out too much about someone’s shortcomings often generates a dislike toward them. Acknowledging the limitation of their old human nature, he graciously challenged them to examine themselves by saying, “A prophet is not without honor except in his town.”

I wonder how many people in Jesus’ hometown took Jesus’ words seriously. It is questionable. But we also need to take Jesus’ words seriously, so we may not let our familiarity breed contempt in our relationships. Of course, it is not easy. It’s challenging but not impossible. We are close to God's kingdom if we can overcome familiarity that breeds contempt. But if we do so, we can experience God’s kingdom here and now.