

Mark 6 (Part 1) - Faith and Unbelief

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Mark chapter 6, beginning at verse 1, it goes like this. *“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.”* (ESV) Stop there, if you would, please. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as always, we come before You that You might open our ears to hear Your voice.

God, give us vision. Give us understanding. Open our hearts to receive from You today. We believe, God, that You have a message in these verses, and we pray that You would open our hearts to receive it. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.

Last week, in our study of Mark, we saw some pretty incredible examples of faith. Particularly, you remember the woman who had that bleeding issue for 12 years? She'd been dealing with a bleeding problem that was not getting any better but only getting worse.

And she believed that if she just was able to touch the hem of Jesus' garment, she would be healed of her infirmity. And so, she pushed through the crowd—huge crowds would follow Jesus—and she was able to touch him, and she was healed. (Mark 5:25-34) You know how the story goes. Fascinating, but an incredible demonstration of faith. We talked about that last week.

And then you have, Jairus, the synagogue ruler, who came to Jesus saying that his little girl of 12 was near death and would Jesus please come and lay hands on her. And you'll remember that during the slow progression of that whole crowd moving along, Jairus was finally met by some of his own servants coming from his home with the news that his little girl had actually passed away, and there was really now no need to continue to bother Jesus about it.

Jesus looked at him—remember what he said? He said, "...*Do not be afraid; just believe.*" (Mark 5:36) And once again, we come back to that issue of faith and the importance of faith.

We talked about the things that we saw in that section last week. If you missed that study, you can go back to our website and watch it or listen to it.

We acknowledged in that study that faith plays a huge part as a key to seeing the power of God manifest in our lives. We also acknowledged that faith is largely a mystery, too.

We looked at that story of the man of the tombs, and we saw an incredible demonstration of God's power. And there wasn't really anybody around that was exercising their faith as it relates to that. It was just God's sovereign move of deliverance for that man.

And we ended our study last week kind of saying, well, you know, hey, faith is really important, obviously. Jesus said to that woman who had the bleeding problem, "...*your faith has made you well.*" (Mark 5:34)

And then we see the man of the tombs healed without any, seemingly, any notice or reference to faith at all. (Mark 5:1-20) And we said, well, there are some mysteries related to this thing. And I don't know how mysteries affect your theology, but they don't do any harm to me. I rather like the fact that the God that we serve still holds mysteries over us.

But this morning, we're going to be looking at the same issue of faith, but if it were a coin, we're going to flip it over. And we're going to look at what's on the other side. And what is on the other side is unbelief. Faith on one side, unbelief on the other.

And you'll notice here that one of the first things that we see in this passage is at the very beginning of verse 6. If you'll look with me there again in your Bible, it says, "*And he (meaning Jesus) marveled because of their unbelief.*"

This is a crazy statement. What does it take to get God to marvel? Well, unbelief is one of the things that causes Him to marvel. And do you know there are only two instances in all of the gospel accounts where Jesus marveled at anything?

And this is one of them right here. He comes into his hometown, and He marvels at their unbelief. The second thing that Jesus marveled at—we talked about this last week—we didn't actually look at the verse, but we talked about that Roman centurion, that Roman soldier, who, a Gentile, came to Jesus and

said, my servant is sick and near death, and would you please heal him? And Jesus said, okay, I'll come with you.

Remember the story? The man said, not necessary for you to come with me. Just give the word. Just give the word, and I know that he'll be healed. You guys remember how that goes?

It's actually in Luke's Gospel. Let me put it up on the screen for you. From Luke, chapter 7, it says:

Luke 7:9 (ESV)

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith."

So, we've got two examples here of Jesus marveling. One is an example of unbelief, where the people just don't believe. And the other is, He marveled at great faith.

The Greek word for marvel simply means to be amazed. There's nothing super mysterious or incredible about it, but we see Jesus marveling—but for opposite reasons: once for faith, once for unbelief.

So what is behind the unbelief that Jesus is seeing here in his hometown? Why is it that these people are expressing such unbelief? Well, let's look at the passage again.

Look at verse 1. It says, "*He went away from there and (then) came to his hometown...*" Now that definitely has a connection: "*He... came to his hometown (and it says that)... his disciples followed him.*"

And so, the first thing we notice is He's coming back to the place where He really began His public ministry for the most part.

You remember it was about a year before the events of this passage, Mark 6, happened. But Jesus actually started off in Nazareth. It says that He got up in the synagogue and read a prophecy from the book of Isaiah. He gave a messianic prophecy, meaning a prophecy related to the ministry of Messiah.

And after He read it, Jesus rolled up the scroll, sat down—which is what they did before they taught—and He said to the people there, in your hearing, these words are fulfilled. And, of course, the room erupted because they freaked out.

That was something that only the Messiah should be able to say had been fulfilled. And yet, Jesus made that declaration.

And you'll remember, they got pretty upset with Him. They literally ran Him out of town with the intention of killing Him, running Him off a cliff—which they weren't successful, obviously, in doing. (Luke 4:16-30)

Now it's a year later. Jesus is back in town, and we're told in verse 2 that : *“And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue...”*

Why are they letting Him teach in the synagogue after just last year having such an issue with Him? Well, they've heard things. They've been hearing what's going on in His ministry, and they are understandably curious because they've been hearing about all of the miracles and the things that He's been saying. And so, they're allowing Him to come back now into the synagogue and to speak.

And it tells us here, as you keep reading in verse 2, that as they listened, it says, they heard Him, and they were astonished. Another interesting word in the Greek—it's very similar to the word marvel. It expresses amazement. They were amazed at what Jesus was saying, and so they began to ask a bunch of questions among themselves. You can imagine this is all kind of swirling around the community.

And if you look with me in verse 2, they begin to ask things like, *“...Where did this man get these things?...”* What about this wisdom that seems to have been given to Him? *“....(And) how are such mighty works done by His hands?”*

By the way, they didn't witness those mighty works; they just heard about them. Because we're told very clearly here that Jesus did no mighty works among them because of their unbelief. So they're just responding to what they've heard. So what about these mighty works we've been hearing about that Jesus has been doing?

And then they began to ask questions in verse 3, like: *“Is not this the carpenter...?”* And then they name His brothers and talk about His sisters—obviously, the children that Mary and Joseph had after Jesus was born and so forth. And then, after all these questions are asked, it simply says this: *“...And they took offense at Him.”* They were offended.

And this is another interesting word in the Greek because it's where we get our word scandal or scandalize, if you will. And basically, this word carries the idea of putting something in someone's path to potentially trip them up. And that's the idea there.

And, in fact, it's particularly interesting because Isaiah, 700 years before Jesus was born, prophesied that Jesus would do this very thing—meaning He would offend people. Let me show you this passage from Isaiah chapter 8. It says,

Isaiah 8:14-15a (ESV)

And he will become a sanctuary and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it.

And He will become a sanctuary (speaking of Messiah) and a stone of offense and a rock of stumbling to both houses of Israel, a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many shall stumble on it.

Many people are going to stumble on this stone of offense. Now, Paul actually makes a quotation of this same passage in the book of Romans, and he talks about how Jesus became a stumbling block because the Jews believed that they would be righteous before God by their works—by being good people and following the law. And they stumbled over Jesus, who told them they couldn't be good enough and so forth. (Romans 9:30-33)

But that's not why they're stumbling here. They're stumbling here for a different reason. Notice the questions again that they ask in verse 3 about Him. They start by saying, *"Is not this the carpenter...?"* And this question isn't as straightforward as it appears. They're not just asking, *"Isn't this Jesus the carpenter...?"* They knew that it was Jesus the carpenter. What they're asking is, isn't He just a carpenter?

You see, you've got to understand something. When Jesus left the first time, it's now a year later, and it says in the very first verse of this chapter that He came to His hometown with His disciples.

In other words, He had the following. There's a bunch of people following him. And when you've got people following you, the assumption is that some people believe He's worth following. So that immediately kind of puts people off a little bit, and they're like, oh, He's got an entourage. Sweet. Isn't he a carpenter? People don't follow carpenters.

So they're like—you see, this is a derogatory kind of question here—to say, what makes Him think that He's worthy to have a group of guys following after Him, calling Him Rabbi? He doesn't have any formal training. He's a carpenter.

Carpenters back in those days worked with wood, stone, and metal. How does that qualify Him for doing these things? That's essentially what is contained in that question. We would say today, who does He think He is, anyway?

And then, look also in verse 3. It says, they asked him, is this not the son of Mary? That's not a polite thing to ask or to say in that way. Do you know that in Jewish culture, you would only reference a man's mother if you wanted to insult him? You would always speak of him and reference his father, even if his father was already passed. You would say, so and so the son of... That was the way you did it in Jewish culture.

To say Jesus, the son of... and then reference his mother is to create a slur, if you will—a derogatory sort of statement related to Him. It's not a compliment.

Why exactly were they offended? They weren't offended by anything He said. They weren't offended by anything He did. They were offended by who He was. That offended them.

Hey, and you know what? There are people today who don't—they don't know what Jesus said exactly. They're not even really sure—may not even believe—what the Bible says Jesus did. They're just offended by who He is because we call Him Savior.

And every year at Christmas, we recite what the angels said to the shepherds: Behold, this day in the city of David is born to you a Savior, Christ the Lord. (Luke 2:11)

Do you know that's offensive to people? People are offended by that. Because the assumption there—the inference—is that people need a Savior. And if you need a Savior, that must mean you're a sinner.

And that's the logical progression. And so people hear that, and they're like, forget that noise. I don't need this Savior character of yours or whatever. See, people are still offended. So, what was the result of their being offended?

Well, in verse 4, you'll notice it says, *"And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.'"* So, this is the first result. They refused to honor Him.

And we see this today, when people are offended by Jesus, they refuse to honor Him according to who He says He is. They will not do that. We will not honor this Jesus character of yours. I don't care. I don't care what you say. I don't care what He says. I don't care what the Bible says. We refuse to believe it. We refuse to honor or speak to Him in that way that would extend honor.

Here's the second result. Look at verse 5. It says, *"And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them."* Which is interesting, because if I laid my hands on a few sick people and they were healed, I would call that a mighty work. But for Jesus, that wasn't

necessarily a mighty work. And what's interesting about this—what we see here—is that their unbelief limited what Jesus could do among them.

Now, that's a very important statement, and because I want you to really take it in—for those of you who, like me, are very visual—I'm going to put it on the screen for you. Here it is:

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Now, here's the interesting part about that. I'm pretty sure they were oblivious to the fact that it was their unbelief that was causing any kind of problem or was any kind of barrier to them seeing the power of God being manifest.

In fact, some of them probably said, yeah, we've been hearing about these miracles. We've been hearing about these incredible things Jesus is doing—kind of waiting to see it happen, that sort of thing.

Which, of course, projects a question concerning whether or not it's even real. They never even question whether or not they might have something to do with it. But we know that they had something to do with the fact that Jesus didn't do very many things around them.

Mark does it more by inference. Matthew just comes right out and says it. Let me show you from Matthew's account, chapter 13, verse 58, it says,

Matthew 13:58 (ESV)

And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

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This is Matthew relating the exact same event. And he just calls it the way it is. Here's why Jesus didn't do much around them—because of their unbelief. Okay. I mean, it's like, there you are.

Now, what's interesting about that—if you bring this to 2016, okay—I can't tell you how many people I've heard say over the course of my life as a Christian something about how, as Christians today, we don't see the kind of miracles that they used to see in the Bible, when you read the Book of Acts.

And people will often say, well, how come we don't see those kinds of miracles like they were going on in the early church? How come? The question carries an inference that perhaps they aren't really supposed to be going on anymore. That's the way Christians will probably conclude.

Here's what they do. They'll say, okay, I see in the Bible those kinds of miracles happened during the growth—Jesus' ministry up through the Book of Acts. But I'm not seeing those same miracles today.

What's their conclusion? Well, then I believe that miracles just died out at the end of the apostolic era. In other words, when the apostles died out, miracles no longer function. Have you ever heard that teaching, by the way? Yeah, me too. Where does that teaching come from?

First of all, does it come from the Bible? No. There is not a shred of biblical evidence to suggest that miracles died out at the end of the apostolic era. The Bible knows nothing of the apostolic era. That's our term. Okay? We made it up. We came up with it.

So why do people believe it? Because they're basing their belief on experience. They're doing just kind of what the people in Nazareth were doing. We hear about these miracles going on. Haven't seen them. So they begin to call it into question. Well, I don't think this stuff even goes on anymore. Based on what? Based on, I don't see it going on. You with me? I don't see miracles going on, they're saying.

What's the problem? They never once consider the possibility they are the problem. Nobody asks. Nobody did in Nazareth, and nobody does today. Nobody says, gee, I wonder if maybe we're not seeing miracles today, or maybe the church doesn't have the power it used to have because of our unbelief.

Why don't people ask that question? The Bible tells you right here—that's the reason that it happened in Nazareth. And can believers be overtaken with unbelief? Absolutely. Jesus rebuked His disciples for their unbelief on several occasions. Even after His resurrection, as He stood among them, He rebuked them for their unbelief and their hard hearts. (Mark 16:14)

So, yeah, real, true believers can begin to walk in an attitude of unbelief. So here's the question I want to get us to consider asking: Is it us? Is it us? Is it our unbelief that is actually limiting the power of God?

Why do we always blame God? Why do we either blame God or some kind of a mysterious calendar that we made up that says, his date—boom! God chopped off the miracles, and no longer after that point were they going to take place?

You can't prove that in the Bible. So why do we do it? Because we don't like to look at the possibility that we may be at fault. Maybe it's our hearts. Maybe we're walking in an attitude of unbelief. I would love just once to hear a Christian say something like, gee, I don't know, maybe we have an issue with unbelief.

Unbelief is a constant danger for believers. There's a passage in the book of Hebrews that sounds a powerful warning to believers. And it goes like this—chapter 3, verse 12:

Hebrews 3:12 (ESV)

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Take care, brothers, (lest there be in any of you brothers. He's talking to brothers. And that word tells you he's talking to believers), lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

Is it possible for a believer to embrace unbelief to some degree? Absolutely. Well, according to the writer of the Book of Hebrews, it's possible. And so, there you go. There's a warning.

Now, that's probably not one of those verses you're going to, again, put up on your refrigerator to give you all kinds of warm fuzzies, but this is a warning nonetheless: Look out. Watch out. Take care. Because unbelief is just waiting to grab you by the jugular.

Man, I tell you, we need faith today as believers. We need Christians to—there's a question that Jesus asked. I don't often hear people mentioning this question that Jesus asked, but it involves His second coming. And it's in Luke's Gospel account. Let me show you here. Chapter 18, verse 8:

Luke 18:8 (ESV)

...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?

...when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

Well, that's a penetrating question, isn't it? And sobering, too. He says, when I come back, I wonder, will I find faith? Or will I find unbelief among people? I wonder.

This is a question we better start asking in our own lives—how is my faith? What's going on inside my heart? That is the question we have to consider because, you see, our faith is more under fire now, here in the United States of America and around the world, than I believe it has ever been before.

And here we are. And I love the United States of America. Let me tell you, I was born and raised here, like most of you. And this is the land that once raised up more missionaries to go into other lands to bring the gospel than any other country in the world.

Most of the Ivy League colleges today—particularly over on the East Coast—that now cost a bundle to go to, they were created originally—and I don't know if you know this—they were created originally to raise up people as missionaries to go into the world and share the Gospel.

The same colleges that you and I probably wouldn't even consider, applying to go to just because they're so expensive and so on and so forth—That's what they were originally created for.

Now, do those colleges still raise up people to take the gospel to the world? Oh, goodness gracious. They have taken on an attitude that is entirely the opposite. You go to those colleges now, you will have your faith assaulted, dismantled, and systematically destroyed. You walk into one of those colleges today and breathe the idea that you believe in the Bible and Jesus as the Savior of the world, and they will laugh you off that campus.

That's what's going on today. But guess what? It's not just limited to our college campuses anymore. This attitude—this desire of the culture around us to secularize everything—has emerged from the college campuses, and it is now in every facet of life.

There is a powerful movement in our nation today to secularize our society—not just government, which I'm not terribly opposed to—but society at large. And we see it every year at Christmas, right? We have to tell people that Jesus is the reason for the season. It's like—why do we have to tell people? And why do they get so angry when we tell them that, right?

They don't want to hear it. Don't tell me. Don't say that. Christmas is not your holiday. It's a secular holiday. It has nothing to do with this Jesus character. It's just all about love and family and warmth and presents and junk. Right? Don't give me this stuff. They want to see it secularized. They want to replace Jesus with Santa, and then that'll be just fine.

And I mean, it's gotten to the point now where you check out at Walmart and you're afraid to say Merry Christmas to the checker—afraid they might bite your head off or tell you they're offended by you simply saying, Merry Christmas.

I have determined I'm going to say Merry Christmas. I don't care. I mean, I'm not going to try—I'm not going to be obnoxious about it—but I'm just going to say, Merry Christmas. Merry Christmas! That's a compound word. Christ-mas! In case they just want to know.

And that brings up the question. So what should our response to all these things be? Anger? It's easy to get angry, isn't it? What does the Bible say about anger?

It says, man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:19-20) Our anger doesn't help anybody, and it's not going to bring anybody to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

In fact, the Scriptures tell us that it is His kindness that leads people to repentance. (Romans 2:4) It's not going to be us getting angry at people and shaking our fist in their face. That's not going to help.

And honestly, I'm not a big—you probably noticed—I'm not a big political activist. No, I'm not a political activist at all because I don't think that's the answer, either. When faced with a world that is absolutely chock full of unbelief and with the knowledge that this is coming to get me, this is coming to take hold of my heart, I have to be proactive to make sure that my response to this overwhelming flood of secularism and unbelief is something that I meet head-on.

Let me put up four quick things that I believe we need to do.

1. Guard your heart

First, we need to guard our hearts. Again, you don't have to go to an Ivy League college to hear a constant barrage of unbelief today. Just open up your Facebook account, or surf the web on news stories, or whatever, or talk to your friends or your coworkers or whatever.

And here—this is the question that we all have to ask ourselves—who's chirping in your ear? And what are they saying? Who are the people in your life who are speaking into your life and into your heart? What are they saying? And what effect is it having on your heart?

These are very important questions, you guys, because if we ignore this stuff, eventually we're going to get laden. We're going to just get laden with all kinds of just—the weight of unbelief. And it is a very hard-attacking sort of a thing.

Do you guys remember when Jesus told us not to cast our pearls before pigs? What did he say about the pigs again? Forgive the reference here, but he basically said, not only will they trample the pearls because they don't have any appreciation for the thing you're saying, but what did He go on to say? They will turn and attack you. (Matthew 7:6)

And they might not get angry, they might not get in your face, they may never yell at you, but they will attack your faith. And you will find over a period of time that your faith is not what it used to be. It has been whittled down. It has been made weaker by just the constant barrage. You got to guard your heart.

Listen, if you've got people on your Facebook account who are constantly posting derogatory, secular, unbelief-filled messages, click unfollow. It's not that big of a deal. You don't even have to unfriend them. Just click unfollow so that you're not constantly seeing this stuff that just wounds your heart and drags you down. You're in control. Take that control about what you're getting into your heart.

And that's the next point that we need to be very careful about.

- 1. Guard your heart**
- 2. Feed your heart/build your faith**

We need to be careful to feed our heart and, consequently, build our faith. Listen, the message is so consistently negative and unbelieving today that if you and I don't take some kind of action to put something good in our hearts, it's going to overwhelm us. There's going to be a tide or a wave of unbelief that'll just carry us out to sea. And this is what the writer of Hebrews is telling us. Take care. Take care that this doesn't happen to you.

So what are you going to do? You've got to do good things for your heart. You know, being in fellowship with other believers regularly, being in the Word constantly, listening to music that's going to lift your heart, lift your spirit.

What you watch, what you read—take care that it's uplifting, that it's actually going to build your faith. When you get done reading that book or done watching that movie, is your faith stronger for it or not? We're living in this day and age where we can't mess around, right?

- 1. Guard your heart**
- 2. Feed your heart/build your faith**
- 3. Pray for God's love**

The third thing is we've got to begin to really pray for God's love for the culture that we live in. Because, see, if we don't, we're just going to—we're going to get bitter. We're going to get angry. Because I hate what's happening to the country that I love. I hate it. I'll just tell you that right off.

I love the United States of America so much that I hate what's happening to it. The fact that it's being constantly secularized, the fact that, they're trying to kick Jesus and God out of every aspect of society. And if I sit and look at that and ponder it, I'm going to get angry after a period of time.

And then what good am I going to be to people? I'll sit around and stew in my juices, but I'll never get a chance to ever share the love of Jesus. And we have to remember something: God loves those people. He loves them.

The Bible says, God so loved the world that He sent His Son. (John 3:16) He loved them so much, and you and I have to reflect that love to the people of the world who are trying to destroy your faith. It doesn't mean I'm going to open my heart to what they're saying, but I do need to open my heart to that person and show the love of Christ. Otherwise, I'm going to be useless, right?

- 1. Guard your heart**
- 2. Feed your heart/build your faith**
- 3. Pray for God's love**
- 4. Be prepared to share your hope**

And then lastly, I've got to be prepared to share the hope that I have in Jesus. This comes right off a passage in Peter where he says, be prepared to give the reason for the hope that you have if anybody asks you. (1 Peter 3:15)

But do you understand that this means practice? Have you ever given a speech somewhere? Have you ever had to give a little talk—a little five-minute thing or whatever? You got to prepare. You have to write it down. You have to look at it. You have to rehearse it. You got to go, okay...

So what if somebody came up to you and said, okay, you seem to have hope in what the Bible says in this Jesus character, right? Yeah. Why? If you're not prepared then it's not going to go very well. Chances are they're more prepared with their statements of unbelief than you are with your statements of faith and truth. And that ought not be.

We should be prepared because we have the ability to be prepared. We've got the Word of God that we can open our heart to and use and reference. And then you can just talk about what God's done in your life.

Christians, we got to be prepared. We're living in this world that is saturated now with unbelief. And if we just sit back and do nothing, I'm telling you, it is going to just soak into every fiber of your being. But we have to guard our hearts, make sure that we're feeding our hearts with good input.

We got to begin—we got to pray—God, give us love for these people. And then we need to be prepared, practiced, ready to share the hope that we have. Amen?