

Mark 6:1-6 + Even Jesus Faced Rejection

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It's a beautiful day. You're spending time with friends, having fun. Your conversations range from the silly to the serious. You're having a good time. At some point, while talking with one of your friends, they open up to you about some of the struggles they've been dealing with lately, some of the guilt or worry or doubt they've been carrying. Your friend has never really been religious. Since you've known them, they haven't expressed any interest in God or his Word. In fact, they've pushed back some at religious talk, but still they trust you enough to talk about their guilt and worry and doubt.

Now as a Christian, you know you have the answer to their guilt, their worry, their doubt. You know your Savior and you know that Jesus tells you to ***“preach the good news.”*** (Mark 16:15) You know that God's Word says, ***“Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”*** (1 Peter 3:15) Yet at that moment, something inside seizes you—fear, but it's not just fear. It's fear of rejection from a dear friend.

You don't want to get burned like you have in the past. You don't want to deal with pushback from this dear friend. You don't want to make things awkward or even potentially lose that friendship. Maybe you even convince yourself that there has to be a better time to talk about Jesus with this friend in a different context. So rather than tell them how Jesus is the answer to their guilt or worry or doubt—something you definitely know from your own life, fear causes you to hold back. You do say something, but rather than give your friend what they need, you say something vaguely religious that hopes for the best—and the opportunity to share your Savior disappears.

Over the years, something I've learned about myself and most Christians is that fear keeps many of us from sharing our faith. Really it's two kinds of fear: fear of rejection and fear of not knowing what to say, which may lead to rejection. After all, who of us wants to get rejected by a loved one for something we say? Who of us wants to look like a fool to our friends? Who of us wants to fumble and stumble over what we have to say about Jesus when we know in our hearts what he has done for us? Who of us wants to fumble and stumble and then face rejection for our foolishness?

So what's your natural tendency when it comes to giving the reason for the hope that you have? Fear creeps in and prevents you from giving that reason for your hope, that good news of Jesus with a stranger or someone you know and love, Funny thing, though, is that you and I aren't the only ones who've faced rejection. **EVEN JESUS FACED REJECTION.**

It was supposed to be a memorable day. Jesus, the famous teacher and healer and hometown hero, was finally coming home to Nazareth! Surely he would be asked to preach on God's Word in the synagogue on Sabbath. Jesus was at the height of his popularity. Crowds swarmed Jesus wherever he went. About a year or so before, he had left Nazareth and made Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee his base of operations. From there he went throughout the region of Galilee teaching and healing.

Jesus had cast out demons, healed lepers and paralytics, calmed storms on the lake, and had just recently raised from the dead the young daughter of Capernaum's synagogue ruler. People from all over flocked to hear Jesus teach. Crowds followed him around the Sea of Galilee. He was always in demand. So for the hometown kid to come back and preach in the Nazareth synagogue? That was going to be pretty special!

When Saturday came around, the synagogue was packed. People from all over town and all over the countryside came to hear Jesus preach. The elders began with the singing of psalms, the responsive liturgy, and the customary prayers, but then the time came for the sermon. Jesus got up and received the scroll containing the words of the Old Testament prophet Isaiah. He read from what we know as Isaiah 61(:1-2), ***“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”*** (Luke 4:18-19) Jesus then explained how this prophecy was fulfilled in him. Jesus was not some self-made rabbi from Nazareth. He was the Messiah.

The people were amazed, impressed at what Jesus had to say. What wisdom—making clear the most difficult Scripture passages! What authority—speaking not as the rabbis endlessly quoting and contradicting each other, but as a prophet of God or even God himself! It was amazing, but wasn't this the son of Joseph the carpenter? Wasn't this the one they remembered playing with their kids in the streets as a boy? Wasn't this the one who helped his father repair a plow as a teenager? Hadn't he built a table for them just a few years ago? ***“Where did this man get these things?” “What is this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles!***

Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"

Soon that seed of the gospel planted in their hearts by Jesus was swept away with offended rejection. The birds of human reason snatched away the seed from their hearts. Jesus offended them with his divine wisdom and authority. Jesus' response to their rejection revealed the truth. ***"Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."*** The gospel writer Mark tells us. ***"He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them."***

It's not that Jesus couldn't heal people there or perform miracles, but they had so thoroughly rejected him that his freely given gifts would've only been demanded proofs of his divinity. In fact, the gospel writer Luke tells us that the people were so offended at Jesus' teaching that they tried to rush him off a cliff! Yet he walked through the crowd unharmed. Rather than rejoicing and reception, Jesus faced rejection from his own hometown. Jesus ***"was amazed at their lack of faith."*** It broke his heart, because these were people he had known all his earthly life—people who now rejected him.

Now the very prophet whom Jesus quoted had also foretold the rejection Jesus faced. Isaiah prophesied, ***"He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."*** (53:3) Jesus faced rejection, but not for his own sake. No, Isaiah reminds us that Jesus endured rejection for our sakes, for our transgressions, for our sins, for our iniquities. Jesus allowed himself to be rejected as part of his daily work of setting aside his glory for us. Jesus faced the rejection of his friends and neighbors because God should reject us for being so offensive by nature to him. Jesus' rejection brings us healing and holy reconciliation with God!

That leads us back to how Jesus responded to this rejection from his own hometown. They had rejected his message. They had even tried to throw him off a cliff, but what did Jesus do? How did Jesus respond to all this? Did he quit? Did he give up? Did he shut his mouth or change his message of the Kingdom? No, Jesus walked through that hostile hometown crowd and ***"went around teaching from village to village."*** In the face of their rejection, Jesus went elsewhere to proclaim the gospel to others who would listen.

Fast forward 2,000 years and look at all the opportunities our Lord gives to us to witness to others. You talk to the friend struggling with financial issues or the neighbor struggling with ongoing health problems or the co-worker struggling with guilt. You get an opportunity to share the good news of Jesus with them—and sometimes they actually receive what you share or at least they're willing to think about it. You rejoice because you shared the gospel.

...But then there are other times when God's Word is not so well-received, times when someone remembers how you sinned or the irresponsible things you've done or consider you a hypocrite because your life is different now in Jesus. Maybe the law and gospel message you have to share defies their logic or doesn't make sense within their worldview—and they push back. You face a couple rejections or objections and it doesn't take much before fear starts to rob you or silence you in those moments of opportunity.

Someone once said, ***"Familiarity breeds contempt."*** The message you shared was a true and powerful one, yet your message was rejected. How does that make you feel when someone pushes back at the gospel you want to share with them? You feel like you want to do anything you can to spare yourself further pain and awkwardness, even if that means no longer witnessing. Yet when fear shuts our mouths, Jesus opens them.

What did Jesus do when his hometown rejected him? Surely he felt the painful sting of rejection that we experience, yet Jesus kept going. Why? He had to make his way to the cross. They weren't going to toss him off that cliff, no matter how much they rejected him, because it wasn't his time yet. That time eventually came when Jesus faced the world's rejection and took that rejection on his own shoulders to reconcile us with God. In fact, Jesus even faced his heavenly Father's rejection so God would turn his gracious love towards us. Why? Because Jesus loves us!

Jesus has made us his own beloved children through water and the Word. He never leaves our side, and now he sends us back out to be his witnesses. When the fear of rejection threatens to shut your mouth, how does Jesus enable you to speak? He renews your trust, your confidence in him to give the reason for the hope that you have when you hear and study his Word and remember what Jesus has done for you!

Jesus faced rejection from people he knew and loved. Yet he was rejected that we might be accepted. He was silenced that we might speak. He was slaughtered that we might be saved. He suffered and died and rose again that we might keep on proclaiming the gospel.

Perhaps the Lord will give you a different opportunity to share your Savior with that relative or friend who rejects your message. Even in Nazareth, there were some—not many, but some who took to heart what Jesus proclaimed on that memorable day. As I've learned over the years, as long as there is life and breath in a person's body, there is still an opportunity to point them to Jesus. It's not our task to argue them into heaven or to change their hearts. That's the Holy Spirit's work. Our task is to be witnesses of what our Lord has done for us and in our lives. Our task is to sow the gospel seed and let the Lord grow it.

So when the Lord gives you another opportunity to share your Savior with someone, what will you do? Some will turn their backs. Some will push back at the message, and yet some will also hear your message and take it to heart or at least keep thinking about it. So let's go with the good news of the Savior, who was rejected for us. Let's go with that same Savior by our side, and let's be his witnesses to the world. Amen.