

Title: Who do you think you are?
Text: Matthew 13.54-58
Theme: The rejection of Christ in his hometown
Series: Matthew #77
Prop Stmtnt: Christ is one of us, but he is not just one of us.

Read Text:

The opening words of the Bible invite us into a setting of awe, wonder, mystery, novelty and purity. The awe is seen in the sheer vastness of God's creative power. The wonder is revealed in the complexities of all of the interconnected intricacies that comprise the creatures themselves. Thousands of years later we are still discovering life forms and eco-systems that humble us with how little we really know about this world. But over all that God made is his repeated statement that it was good, it was good, it was good, until God, in his last act of creation on the 6th day made Eve, and then, and only then did God say, now, it was very good. Awe, wonder, mystery, novelty and purity. When there was no sin thrills awaited the explorer, but no danger existed. Captivating learning was there for the student, with no need for discernment, since no lies were known. And for the 1st couple, there was love, selflessness, sharing, intimacy, acceptance, joy, trust, harmony and rest.

In the midst of this paradise was a tree and a rule. One rule. One prohibition. One statement of warning. Just one. Do not eat the fruit from that tree. Can you imagine being a parent and only having to teach your child one rule? That's it! One rule: Do not eat the fruit from that tree. One rule protected them from thousands of others. This one rule was not unfair. It was not a lie. It was not to hurt them, it was to protect them from a thousand curses, from broken hearts, from broken dreams, from broken promises, from broken lives, from broken bodies, from cancer, from ALS, from Parkinson's, from Ebola, from Glaucoma, from heart disease and lung disease, from lies, from cursing, from betrayal, from rape, from murder, from bitterness, from depression, from loneliness, from emptiness, and from betrayal. This one rule, just one rule was the safeguard that held out all evil. There, in the garden, was the tree. Now, would Adam be the obedient son?

What if Adam would have known all of the consequences of his decision, would he have still made that choice to take the fruit from Eve and eat it himself? While he did not know every detail, he knew enough. God had said, "no." It was a kind "no." It was a merciful, loving, protective and truthful "no." And in that moment when Adam saw the fruit and wanted the fruit and took the fruit, the creation said to the Creator, "Who do you think you are? We will not have you rule over us. We will be our own king and we will have our own kingdom."

If there is anything that we learn from history, it is that we do not learn from history. This scene in Eden has been re-enacted billions of times since in the life of every single human being (with one glorious exception). Some of those re-enactments have been on a more spectacular level. For example, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord and prepared for God's judgment upon the earth by preaching and by building the Ark. His world treated him, like Adam treated God. "Who do you think you are? We will not listen to

you and we will not have God tell us how to live our lives.” Though the world was rescued through Noah, and though Noah was a preview of Christ, the salvation that Noah brought was short-lived.

The scene is repeated again in Moses. He too was a preview of Christ. He left his royal and privileged surroundings in order to identify with his people who were hopelessly enslaved. Witnessing injustice by an Egyptian overlord upon an Israelite slave, Moses stepped in and in that moment, he made a fateful decision. He came to his own. He identified with his own. He stepped into their world in order to make it his own that he might rescue them from a fate that they could never deliver themselves from. But, incredulously, the Israelites tell him, “Who do you think you are? We don’t need you. We will not have you rule over us. We will fix ourselves.”

Years later, when Israel is again desperate for deliverance, one of their own is chosen by God, but scorned by his own brothers. There are so many previews of Christ in the life of David. This one is in 1 Samuel 17 when David comes to the camp of the Israelites who are terrified by the Philistine hero/warrior – Goliath. David’s confidence in God is not shared by others; particularly his own brothers. Who do you think you are David? Why have you really come down to see this battle? Why aren’t you watching the sheep, boy?! We don’t need you telling us what to do. We don’t want you. You don’t belong here. All of this took place after David had been anointed king in front of them by Samuel.

All of these events were predictions. But, they did not predict something good. They revealed a pattern of rebellion, arrogance, ignorance and utter stupidity. What exactly is the rational in the first place that would cause Adam to say to God, “We will not have you rule over us!” And yet, ever since Adam that has been our battle cry. And when God sends people to be his representatives, we treat them the same way we would treat God if he came in the flesh. And the reason we know that is because God did come in the flesh. This is our text for today. Jesus, the Son of Man and the Son of God, is back in his hometown of Nazareth. And honestly, if Jesus had not been raised in Nazareth, it is likely that we would never have heard of this town. It is not a place of destiny. It is not a place of promise and upward mobility. John Mellencamp sang, “I was born in a small town, and I live in a small town, prob’ly die in a small town....” Small town’s have their own rules and one of those rules is for you to know your place. Don’t get out place. Don’t upset things. Keep to the code.

I. **What happened in Nazareth?**

Jesus left the area by the Sea of Galilee (map) and headed south and west to his hometown of Nazareth. This had all the makings of a local boy hitting it big and coming home as the pride of Nazareth. I grew up in North-eastern Ohio. Chris Spielman grew up just west of me and LeBron James, just north of me. The return of LeBron to Cleveland is quite a story and because of my roots, I resonate with it. It is also why moving to Detroit about 30 years ago now, was not a big deal since the climate and the culture had many similarities to it. We love it when our boys and girls grow up and make it big, unless,

(and this is a very big unless) unless you come back and criticize what you came from. That is unforgiveable. Well...

A. Jesus said some unexpected things. (54a)

Jesus taught in their synagogue. This was most likely the synagogue that he grew up in as a boy. The synagogue was more than the community “church” on Saturday. The synagogue was the seat of power, the hub of connection, the focal point of all decisions that affected the community. The synagogue was like the city hall, including the mayor, city council, police and judicial department combined with the city church. There was not distinction between the political and the religious governance. The religious leaders were the political leaders. The leaders of the synagogue controlled everything that went on in that town.

Now, it was common for different men to speak in the synagogue. Time was allotted for men to stand up and read the Scriptures and then to expound. Undoubtedly, there was a bit of anticipation when Jesus stood up since news and rumors about him had reached Nazareth. Luke’s gospel gives us more of the content of what Jesus said. Matthew does not focus on what he said, but on how he is received. Now again, Nazareth was a gritty little town. Everybody knew everybody and there were no colleges where people could be educated and trained to get a better job. You were born into your role and occupation. Whatever your family did, you did. You had a place and everyone knew it. Everyone knew that Jesus was not trained as a Rabbi. He had no credentials that would authorize him to stand up and say the things that he did. Jesus read a portion of Isaiah that spoke about the Messiah who was to come and then told the people in the synagogue that the prophecy of Isaiah had just been fulfilled before them.

Now, on the one hand, he read beautifully. Luke says that they all “*spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth.*” When I put the gospel accounts of this event together, I get the sense that the people were initially focused on how he spoke. And he did well. He was easy to listen to. He did not stutter or lose his words. His manner of speaking put the people at ease. He knew what he wanted to say and said it well. His presentation was impressive. But, then something begins to change.

B. The people were stunned and confused. (54b-56)

It seems to me that after they got over how well he spoke, that they began to consider what exactly he said, and then the questions started coming. It was as if he did too well. Wait a minute, how could this be? Where did this guy learn to talk like this and did you hear what he was saying?

a. They question the real source of his wisdom and power.

Now their initial impression turns to questions and the questions turn to suspicion and the suspicion turns to hostility and finally rejection. Watch how this plays out. They are trying to get their arms around what just happened. So there is this group conversation

taking place. “Where did this man get this wisdom (that was just put on display) and these mighty works (rumors and perhaps a miracle or two had been done since v.58 says that “he did not do *many* mighty works there.”)? This was too good. Something is not right about this. Due to the content of what Jesus said, and to the obvious power of the works that he performed, he was either from God, or had somehow figured out how to leverage the power of evil. And, they knew that he was not from God, right? They knew who his family was.

b. They remind themselves about his family.

Matthew captures some of the questions and statements that were bantered about in this conversation. Is not this the carpenter’s son? By the way, in Mark’s account, he records that one of them asked, is not this the carpenter? This is very insightful for us. Here’s why. If you want to be a carpenter you find someone who will teach you. Then you can either go out on your own, or join a crew, or become a journeyman and get into the union. There are a few options for you. My point is if you want to be a carpenter, you can pursue being a carpenter. But Nazareth had a carpenter. Joseph was the carpenter. Joseph was probably the carpenter because his dad had been the carpenter. When Jesus was 13 years old, he went to work for his dad. There were no teenagers then. You went from being a child to being an adult. Life expectancy was pretty low, middle age was 25. Do you realize that Jesus was the son of the carpenter, and then after the death of Joseph was the town carpenter for close to 20 years?! And what was he doing for those 20 years? With every cut, every plane, every chisel, and every job, he was pleasing his heavenly Father. He was fulfilling His Father’s plan for his life. He was accomplishing the will of God. He was perfectly obeying and fulfilling all righteousness. He was living the life that you and I could not live and he was doing it as a no-name carpenter in a dirty little backwoods town called Nazareth. Nazareth was such a joke that when Nathaniel was told that Jesus was from there, Nathaniel scoffed. What good can come from Nazareth? And for about 20 years, the Son of God got up day in and day out and served as a carpenter and he did it with joy because everything he did pleased the Father.

When we consider this, we are amazed, humbled, and definitely convicted. And I could just park the tour bus right here for the rest of the sermon and unpack the implications of just this one fact. I will leave it to your small group discussions to pick up on this and chew on it further. There is much to consider, but we must move on. While we are amazed in a good way his hometown was not. They identified him by his occupation and family since in their minds they all went together. He was not from a rabbinical family. He was one of us! He couldn’t be from God, his mom, his brothers, his sisters, are all here. Who does he think he is? And now, the tone begins to change. Now, in view of that, they begin to give consideration to what he just said and they are offended. Luke says that at this point Jesus reminds them that there were many widows in Israel during the famine in the days of Elijah, but that he went and helped a Gentile widow in Sidon. There were also many lepers in Israel during the days of Elisha but that he healed a Gentile leper named Namaan. At this point, these people go bonkers!

C. Jesus offended his “own people.” (57a)

He was not the Messiah that they were looking for. Are you kidding me? We watched you grow up. We watched you learn carpentry. We watched you sit in the synagogue. You are not the Messiah. And yet, they ask, “Where did this man get all these things?” (Wisdom and power) (56b). The word that is translated “offense” is the word “scandalized.” This is much deeper than a personal offense.

D. Jesus responded. (2 ways)

a. Words

“A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” If you are going to lead the orchestra or the choir, you have to turn your back on the crowd. That is hard to do when the crowd is your own family. These people were saying that Jesus was just like one of them. There was some truth to what they said. He was like one of them, but he was not just like one of them. There is an old saying that “familiarity breeds contempt.” The people, who knew him, did not really know him because they put him into a preconceived category of what a boy from Nazareth was supposed to be like. They also had a preconceived category of what the Messiah was supposed to be like and Jesus did not fit that either.

Beloved, in many ways, nothing has changed. People have their own preconceived ideas of who Jesus is, and what it means to be a Christian. In so many cases, their ideas are not an accurate reflection of God’s Word. Their Jesus is not the true Jesus. And in a similar way, when you become a follower of Christ, you can expect this sort of backlash. “Who do you think you are?”

b. Lack of deeds

Jesus then chose not to do the same amount of miracles that he was accustomed to doing in other places. There was no point. They had already made up their minds that he could not be the Messiah; therefore, his miracles would only have given them more evidence to rebel against and even more judgment. This was, like his parables, an act of judgment and mercy all at the same time. By the way, their lack of faith did not mean that Jesus found his divine power stifled by their unbelief, as if we control God. No, Jesus did not always demand faith before he healed. In John 5, Jesus healed a lame man who had no idea what his name was, much less who he was. Jesus raised young man from the dead when nothing in the text says a thing about anyone asking him to do it or believing that he could. The demon-possessed man in the Gadarenes certainly had no faith. So, when prosperity preachers and teachers use this verse to say that your faith unleashes the power of God for healing and that if you only have enough faith that you can be healed and that you are not healed only because of your unbelief, they are simply teaching a Pelagian heresy. Obviously, I am not going to go into this in detail like I have in other sermons (see Isaiah 53.5), but I should say this. Jesus often did miracles in an atmosphere of belief. He did not always require it, but when there was a setting of belief, he often gave them more revelation in terms of words and deeds to encourage and fuel their belief.

Here, there was outright rejection and hostility. Jesus chose not to do many miracles because that would only cause more rebellion. We are almost halfway through Matthew, and we find the weight of this gospel getting heavier and heavier. Christ is one of us, but he is not just one of us.

II. **Why is this significant?**

A. **What happened to John is what will happen to Jesus**

This account transitions us from the parables to a section of utter polarization. There is a misunderstanding of who Jesus is by his own people. There is a misunderstanding of who Jesus is by Herod. The people think that he is just one of them. Herod thinks he is John the Baptist who was resurrected. So, at this point, Matthew tells us the tragic account of John's death, which we will look at next week. Obviously, one of the major themes that is being developed by Matthew centers on the true identity of Jesus. The people don't get it. Herod doesn't get it. The disciples seem to start to get it when they say (14.33) "Truly you are the Son of God" and then Peter nails it explicitly in 16.16 when he emphatically declares "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus affirms that Peter got it! This is one of the themes that Matthew is developing. But, there is a related theme. The more the true identity of Christ is revealed, the greater the hostility there is against him. In fact, the fate of John is a preview of what is in store for Christ.

B. **What happened in Nazareth is what happened in Israel.**

We also see that what happened in Nazareth is what happened in Israel. Christ is not only rejected by his own (hometown) he is rejected by his own (nation/people). Nazareth is like the point in the pond where the stone lands. The ripples go out from there. The cries of the people sound all too familiar from the centuries before them. "We will not have this man rule over us." In fact, at his trial to come, we will hear them say, "We have no king but Caesar." As much as they hated the occupation of the Romans in their land, they actually hated Jesus even more.

C. **What happened in Israel is what happens all over the world.**

Every time we rebel against God's laws, we are rebelling against God himself. Every time we attempt to change his Word into saying something that suits our preferences, we are saying, "We will not have you rule over us. We will take it upon ourselves to make up our own rules and we expect you God, to cooperate and affirm our independence and right to self-govern.

D. **What happens all over the world has consequences.**

The rejection of Christ by Israel brought about a subsequent destruction upon Israel. I believe that the national destruction of Israel, effected by the Romans, was a preview of the world-wide destruction that awaits our rebellious world. You cannot reject the Creator and spit in the face of the King without consequences.

III. Stuff to chew on.

A. Is what you believe about Jesus the same as what Jesus believed about himself?

Listen carefully. It is comfortable, convenient and culturally very, very acceptable to create an extremely low threshold of belief and call it saving faith. Some people think that as long as you believe in Jesus, that you are okay. God is cool with that. Hold the phone. The Bible NEVER says that as long as you have some vague belief in the reality of Jesus, that you are cool with God. The demons in hell believe in the reality of Jesus. The demons in hell believe in the power and the authority of Jesus and they are not cool with God? The demons in hell even submit themselves to Jesus, and they are not cool with God. What makes your belief about Jesus different than demons? The demons do not love Jesus. The demons do not submit out of love. They submit because they have to. Therefore, I am not asking if you have some generic, vague, ill-defined quasi belief about the existence of Jesus. What do you believe about Jesus? What do you exactly believe about yourself in relationship to Jesus? This is why Matthew is writing this entire section. If you do not repent of your sin, if you do not trust in Christ as your King and Savior, if you do not surrender the control of your life to his authority then, you have no right to claim to be his follower. Followers of Christ follow Christ! Followers of Christ do not live their own lives based upon their own rules. Followers of Christ do not say to Christ, "We will not have you to rule over us" but instead say, from the heart, "I love you. I surrender to you. I happily place myself under your authority. My life is yours. I own you as my King."

B. If this is what happened to Jesus, what kind of a reception should you expect?

I want you to be prepared for what happens to Christians all over the world. Let's say that your life has been in bondage to drugs or alcohol. You have some friends who are concerned about you, and that is good. If you go to some generic re-hab program, they are very supportive. But, if you come to Christ, and the gospel hijacks your life, as it has for some of you, then, some of the same people who were concerned about you, or even some of your drinking friends do not want to hang out with you anymore. Some of them may even accuse of you being "too good for them now." Their words hurt because you know full well, that you are not too good for them at all. Beloved, it happens. It hurts, but it happened to Jesus and it hurt him deeper than it does us. He knows.

C. If Jesus could please His Father as a no-name carpenter, I too can work for the glory of God, no matter what my job is.

Church, I know that so many of you seek to please the Lord because you love him. You love the gospel. You love the church. You love your family. It shows and it matters. And yet some of you wonder, if what you are doing day in and day out is really all that important. Are you making any difference at all? Is your contribution meaningful in

anyway? Is the kingdom of Christ any different at all by your life? Would anything really change if you were not here? I know that we all ask those questions. I ask that question. But the answer to that is so clear. We all have a place. And our part, no matter how minimal or mundane it appears to be matters. No day is meaningless when lived for the pleasure of God. If you are feeding a baby every 90 minutes, changing oil in cars, designing parts, building parts, assembling vehicles, motivating employees, cleaning hotel rooms, serving patients, trying to teach students who do not want to learn, designing graphics, making sales, or balancing books, your work matters because your life matters because your King and his kingdom matter. Enjoy your Father this week. Enjoy his pleasure in your faithful perseverance. You are loved by the King and by your church. Everything you do matters. Every unseen work is noticed by heaven.