

Who is Jesus?
Jesus the Rejected Prophet
Matthew 13:53-58

Introduction

Hard to Believe: What makes it hard to believe someone? Have you ever been in a situation where someone told you something and you refused to believe it? (Velvet Cloak lady).

What Makes Jesus Hard to Believe?: Something about Jesus makes him hard to believe for a lot of people. For the people in the story today, the issue was not Jesus' powerful teaching or miracles that were questioned (those were undisputed). The issue was his **identity**. He is the promised Messiah, come to save his people. He is God become flesh. He is the true King.

- Jesus always acts out of his identity, that's why it is essential to answer the question: **Who is Jesus?** (current sermon series).
- He's been teaching and doing miracles. His teaching and miracles are largely undisputed (e.g., teaches with authority, heals the sick, etc.). The hangup for many people is the identity of Jesus.
- We've been talking about the Kingdom of God (e.g., "your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven"). Jesus has been announcing the arrival of the Kingdom. But it appears that many people want the Kingdom without the King (e.g., peace, joy, no tears/pain, etc.). The purpose of Jesus' teaching was not, primarily, to help us understand that he is **the king of the Kingdom of God**. The miracles exist to validate his message and his identity.
- And in today's passage we see that those who should have believed in Jesus instead rejected him.

⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, ⁵⁴ and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? ⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.¹

1. Familiar Audience (vv. 53-54)

¹ ⁵³ Καὶ ἐγένετο ὅτε ἐτέλεσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς τὰς παραβολὰς ταύτας, μετήρεν ἐκεῖθεν. ⁵⁴ καὶ ἐλθὼν εἰς τὴν πατρίδα αὐτοῦ ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς ἐν τῇ συναγωγῇ αὐτῶν, ὥστε ἐκπλήσσεσθαι αὐτοὺς καὶ λέγειν, Πόθεν τούτῳ ἡ σοφία αὕτη καὶ αἱ δυνάμεις; ⁵⁵ οὐχ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τοῦ τέκτονος υἱός; οὐχ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ λέγεται Μαριάμ καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ αὐτοῦ Ἰάκωβος καὶ Ἰωσήφ καὶ Σίμων καὶ Ἰούδας; ⁵⁶ καὶ αἱ ἀδελφαὶ αὐτοῦ οὐχὶ πᾶσαι πρὸς ἡμᾶς εἰσιν; πόθεν οὖν τούτῳ ταῦτα πάντα; ⁵⁷ καὶ ἐσκανδαλίζοντο ἐν αὐτῷ. ὁ δὲ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Οὐκ ἔστιν προφήτης ἄτιμος εἰ μὴ ἐν τῇ πατρίδι καὶ ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ. ⁵⁸ καὶ οὐκ ἐποίησεν ἐκεῖ δυνάμεις πολλὰς διὰ τὴν ἀπιστίαν αὐτῶν.

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Next Scene: ⁵³ And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, This is the follow up to the parables (and his teaching ministry and miracles). “And when...” is a change in section, putting an end to the last section and launching the next stage of narrative. Jesus is literally moving on to the next location and so is the story (and its intended point). **How has Jesus been received to this point?**

- In some places he has been received as a popular teacher and miracle worker (e.g., Capernaum, Sea of Galilee).
- But he warned us that not all the initial excitement was genuine faith and discipleship (e.g., parable of the sowers; initial excitement that withers with persecution, worry, or has no depth).
- And we’ve seen him rejected by the Pharisees and religious leaders (e.g., “opposing Jesus”).

Hometown Reception: ⁵⁴ and coming to his hometown How will he be received in his hometown? Will they roll out the red carpet? This is their hometown guy! (e.g., kids view of celebrity parents; rock-and-roller changing diapers; me as preacher at camp vs. youth pastor).

The Method of the Messiah: he taught them in their synagogue His typical strategy was to go to the synagogue first. ¹⁶ And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and he stood up to read (Lk 4:16). Usually there was a prescribed Torah reading and then a “dealer’s choice” out of the prophets. In Luke, he was given the great Isaiah prophecy, recorded on a scroll (a central part of the Jewish community and the most valuable thing in the local community). ¹⁷ And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” ²⁰ And he rolled up the scroll and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹ And he began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Lk 4:17-21).

- Because he is a gracious king, he brings freedom, healing, and joy. But those are the evidence and effects of his reign (don’t get distracted by the gifts and miss the giver). His point was clear. He was showing them that **he** (himself, in his person) was the fulfillment of the prophecy. The news of the Kingdom flowed through the reality **that he was the King**. He is the one they have waited for. He is the answer to their questions, the satisfaction to their longings, the embodiment of their hopes and the vanquishing of their fears.

- His message is completely true. He is not arguing with you about it, or bargaining with you on the terms, or even waiting for you to understand it (though he is patient and gentle, inviting you into his kingly rule). He is announcing the good news of his reign and rule. That is the message he proclaims.

⁴² And when it was day, he departed and went into a desolate place. And the people sought him and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them, ⁴³ but he said to them, “I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns as well; for I was sent for this purpose.” ⁴⁴ And he was preaching in the synagogues of Judea (Lk 4:42-44). His earthly ministry was, primarily, a teaching ministry. The miracles served the message (i.e. signs). The signs (e.g., John) confirm the message.

Teaching Ministry: Don't underestimate the role of preaching and teaching the gospel. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt 28:18-20). The demonstration of the gospel, flows out of the *truth* of the gospel. The foundation of our faith and the content of our obedience are contained in the truth of the gospel. No one can live a life of faith without hearing the gospel: ¹⁴ How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” ¹⁶ But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?” ¹⁷ So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Rom 10:14-17).

- Every one of us is responsible to go and proclaim the gospel. “Preach the gospel; when necessary, use words” is like saying “make me dinner and if necessary use food.”

There are a lot of reasons we are committed to teaching **the Bible** and even teaching it **the way we do**. Not least of these reasons is the method of Jesus' ministry being that of Bible teaching.

How Do I Know God?: A basic truth we have to understand is this: we can only know God through God. We can only learn about God from God. We don't discover God on our own. We don't dissect him in a lab. We don't experiment with various materials to figure him out. We don't logically deduce God. Because of our limitations as humans and our more problematic self-deception as sinners, we can only know God because he reveals himself to us. And he reveals himself clearly through Scripture (“I want to hear from God.” Then read your Bible. “No, I want to hear from God with my ears.” Then read your Bible out loud).

- This is why the Bible is at the center of our Bible Studies, worship services, discipleship relationships, etc. (*and why it should be at the center of our lives). One of the most dangerous things you can do is neglect your Bible. “Thousands of voices are attempting to convince you how to think. Make sure you are being shaped by the Bible and not the world. More Scripture, less social media. More Bible, less pundits” (Kell).
- This is why the apostles and early church, following in the footsteps and methodology of Jesus, go to such great lengths to encourage us to “sound doctrine.” And Paul makes

sure we understand that **good doctrine** and **godly behavior** are two sides of the same coin. “The gospel creates the church, the church confirms the gospel” (Capps).

- When we weekly feed on God’s word together as a church and individually as followers of Christ, we are tilling the soil of our soul to receive the gospel and produce its fruit.
- The truth of God’s Word directs your steps, fixes your focus, examines your motivations.

The Nazarene Response: so that they were astonished What is the local response?

Astonished: idiom “to be blown away.”² Why are they blown away? Because, as we’ll find out, they know Jesus from his childhood and family and witness his “wisdom” and “mighty works” and the two don’t compute.

Questioning Jesus: They ask the question: “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? This begins a series of 6 questions:

- “Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?”
- Is not this the carpenter’s son?
- Is not his mother called Mary?
- Are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?
- ARE not all his sisters with us?
- Where then did this man get all these things?”
- The first and last question are essentially the same and “bookend” the other questions, setting the tone of their skepticism.
- There was no doubt at the power and might of Jesus, the problem was the dissonance between what they personally believed and the evidence they were witnessing. Their refusal to trust in Jesus was a refusal to see from God’s perspective. **They didn’t doubt his ability but his identity.** They loved what he did but couldn’t accept who he was. They refused to submit to his revelation

They clung to their personal perspective.

2. Personal Perspective (vv. 55-56)

⁵⁵ Is not this the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?”

The Human Savior: They had a personal experience with Jesus. They knew his family. *This is one of the more interesting descriptions of Jesus’ life and family.

- **“Carpenter”** (τέκτων): More accurately a builder, construction worker (more likely a mason but good with all types of materials and tools). He would have been an important person in the community (especially a small village like Nazareth which only had 500 or, at most, 1,000 people).

² ἐκπλήσσω: etymologically related to “strike” and meaning “strike out” or “drive away” but came to idiomatically mean “frighten or amaze” (from “to drive out of one’s senses?”).

- **Joseph** is not mentioned in this passage (though he is in the corresponding Luke passage). Some have speculated that this is Matthew's way of emphasizing Jesus' relationship to his heavenly father (which makes some sense based on chapter 12: "While he was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.")
 - Other historians take the absence of Joseph (chs 12-13) to indicate he had already passed away.
- **Mary**, Jesus' mother, is mentioned here. One of the finest examples of faith in the Bible, Mary occupies an interesting place in Christianity. Roman Catholicism quickly elevated Mary, and invented plenty of theological justification to bolster her holiness (including the belief about her perpetual virginity). An unnecessary speculation (she's revered enough in Scripture) that is disproven by the clear description of a text like this.³ This doctrine developed under the popular view that sex was somehow bad and virginity was somehow intrinsically more holy.
 - *Remember that there is a better and more reliable source than the tradition of the church (though that is still valuable to us) in the NT. *Sola Scriptura*.
- **Brothers** named are James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. All are common Hebrew names of the time. Joseph, named after his Father. But James and Judas are the most interesting in Christian history.
 - James (Jacob) is the most famous of Jesus' brothers and author of the NT book bearing his name.
 - But Judas also is a Biblical author (e.g., Jude).
- **Sisters**, unnamed, are also mentioned.

Earthly Eyes: What is the problem? A man whose local pedigree is so well known can hardly be thought of as something extraordinary. They thought they knew Jesus because they knew his history, family, and upbringing.

- The astonishing wisdom and mighty works don't compute with the local boy they "think" they know (e.g., like a friend who becomes a doctor; Whitney's college roommate).
- They knew voice, height, etc. They remembered him on the track team, in the school play, etc. But they were "too close to see" (Quarles). They missed the forest for the trees.

But the **eyes of the flesh** are not able to see who Jesus really is. "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (Jn 1:11). "All the true knowledge they had in the flesh, they still didn't know him savingly" (Dever). Doubting Thomas pericope: Jesus said to him, "Have you

³ Some interpreters, seeking to defend a doctrine of the "perpetual virginity of Mary," have suggested that these were cousins, or children of Joseph from another marriage, but no evidence in the Greek words *adelphoi* ("brothers") and *adelphai* ("sisters"), or in any other historical information, gives support to that view (*ESV Study Bible*).

believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (Jn 20:29).

- **Jesus was in the box of their expectations** (e.g., Quest for the Historical Jesus made him look suspiciously like a nineteenth century, white, European liberal academic; when we look in the mirror we see a Jesus that looks like us; false view of objective history). We run the dangerous risk of making Jesus into who we want him to be. Rather than accepting him for who he is, submitting to him, we want him to bend to our whims, will, and expectations.
 - If every time you read the Bible, it confirms what you already think and feel then you are worshipping yourself, not God (e.g., I think something is right, therefore God must condone it). We’ve baptized our **politics** and our behavior so often in the language of our faith because our starting point is what we want to be right, not what God says is right.

How Do We Miss the Identity of Jesus: What keeps us from seeing Jesus as God’s son, our Savior, God become flesh, King of kings, the crucified and risen lamb?

- Jesus is not simply a **wise sage**, a **moral philosopher**, a **personal genie**, a **political activist**, a **spiritual guru**, an **angry parent**, or **behavior police**.

Spiritual Eyes: They had all this earthly information but they didn’t have the spiritual eyes to see Jesus’ true identity. They could see every one of Jesus’ earthly relatives but couldn’t perceive his heavenly father. Their expectations, opinions, misconceptions, preconceived notions, etc. all got in the way of truly seeing Jesus. And it’s not like Jesus didn’t clearly reveal who he was!!!

3. Reality of Rejection (vv. 57-58)

⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

Offended by Jesus: ⁵⁷ And they took offense at him. *σκανδαλίζω* This word (as both a noun and verb) is used often in the NT (e.g., cause to sin, offended, fall away, gospel as offense, etc.). Is this like John’s stumbling at the surprising ministry of Jesus (Matt 11:6) or something more catastrophic (e.g., eye causing you to stumble, or rootless seed that falls away)?

- They cannot get over their own expectations of who *they* think Jesus is supposed to be (“I cannot worship a God who…”).

Familiar Refusal: But Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household.” This little saying illustrates a profound point. Familiarity didn’t breed faith. Familiarity doesn’t equal true understanding.

- We often *think* we know who Jesus is but we need to be careful that we aren’t trying to define him by our preferences rather than who he reveals himself to be.

- Familiarity dulls our perception (e.g., not awed by natural wonders; growing up at Virginia Beach; or living in Denver, CO). New believers are amazed at the Bible, the things of good (one reason why they're so important to the vibrant gospel culture of our church).
 - We should not be able to casually sing and talk about the amazing worth of Jesus. Are your senses dulled to the amazing beauty of Jesus? "Our worship of Christ is a reflection of our belief in Christ. What we believe about Jesus will determine everything about how we worship Jesus" (Platt).

Jesus Rejected: But we also shouldn't be shocked when Jesus is rejected. The call to follow Jesus is completely free but it requires that we die to ourselves *and most of us love ourselves too much to love Jesus with all of our heart, soul, mind, and strength.*

- The call of Christ is one to life-everlasting, forgiveness of sins, unmerited grace, contentment, joy, peace, true community, etc. but it can't be had if we hold onto our own hopes, dreams, expectations, etc. We have to let go of our way and follow Jesus' way (and many are unwilling to let go). The teachings of our Savior are hard but our trust in him is greater than their difficulty.
- And if Jesus is rejected then, as his followers, we should expect to experience rejection.

Can't See What You Don't Believe is There: ⁵⁸ And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief. Notice the problem of the crowd in his hometown: **unbelief**. Their supposed familiarity with Jesus blinded them to his true identity. Their refusal to believe guaranteed they would not be given further incentive to believe. His hometown is the camp of the skeptics.

- Unbelief is obstinate (Dever). It refuses to see what's right in front of its eyes. It refuses to acknowledge the truth. We see this is a lot of our discourse today but it's been going on forever.
 - "Their love for truth takes the form that they love something else and want this object of their love to be the truth; and because they do not want to be deceived, they do not wish to be persuaded that they are mistaken. And so they hate the truth for the sake of the object which they love instead of the truth. They love the truth for the light it sheds, but hate it when it shows them up as being wrong" (Augustine).
 - Isn't this true of our view of Jesus? We love being right and in control and are happy to let Jesus validate us *but as soon as he challenges us* we would sooner corrupt his message or refuse to believe in him.
 - It's not intelligence, wealth, culture, historical situation, etc. (plenty of people from all walks of life have not believed and have believed). What prevents us from following Jesus is unbelief (e.g., **trust, faith, submission**).
- Skepticism looks for a reason not to believe. For some it is the fact that they haven't seen Jesus, for others it's the fact that they have. Unbelief will use any excuse.
- But we walk by faith.

What is Belief: It is not the amount of our faith, but the object of our faith that matters. When we say we have faith in Jesus, it doesn't mean we have perfect belief it means we trust him completely. Of course, because we are humans, we have doubts. "A faith without some doubts is like a human body without any antibodies in it. People who [carelessly] go through life too busy or indifferent to ask hard questions about why they believe as they do will find themselves defenseless against the experience of tragedy or the probing questions of a smart skeptic. A person's faith can collapse almost overnight if [he or] she has failed over the years to listen to [their] own doubts... Believers should acknowledge and wrestle with doubts" (Keller). But "saving faith isn't a level of psychological certainty; it is an act of the will in which we rest in Jesus" (Keller).

Conclusion

We've seen the response of the Nazarenes. They heard his words, saw his works, yet denied him worship. What will we do? Will we follow Jesus, submit to Jesus, *trust* Jesus, and walk in obedience to Jesus?

Those who should have believed in Jesus instead rejected him because they couldn't believe he was who he said he was, they were only willing to follow a Jesus that they invented.

So What?:

- **Don't be surprised that some reject Jesus.** Following Jesus is at once completely simple and extremely difficult. It is simple because it is free, there are no wealth requirements or intellectual barriers. But it is difficult because it means not following the path of the world or our own desires.
- **Don't assume you or someone else knows Jesus.** Often our lack of faith is masked by misconceptions about Jesus. Sometimes we trick ourselves into thinking we are following Jesus because we are familiar with the stories about him. But we need to examine our hearts and make sure we're not just following what we want to follow, a Savior we've invented in our own hearts and minds.
- **Don't be stubborn in unbelief.** If Jesus is calling you to follow him, don't refuse to submit to him because it's difficult, or you don't understand it all. Run to the arms of your gracious Savior. Take him all your fears, doubts, and concerns. He is strong enough to handle every challenge and gracious enough to love you through it all.