

Sermon Outline

“Wrong Ways To Respond To Jesus,” Matthew, Part 42 – Matthew 13:53-14:12 – Mark Mitchell – July 14, 2013

Introduction

1. This passage features two stories in two settings – the reaction of devout Jews to Jesus’s teaching in the Nazareth synagogue, and a gruesome execution ordered by an immoral Roman ruler during his birthday party.
2. Though seemingly very different, both stories deal with one central question: How will we respond to Jesus?

Scene 1: Nazareth Synagogue (Matthew 13:53-58)

1. As Jesus traveled throughout the cities and villages of Israel, he powerfully proclaimed the gospel of the kingdom and healed every kind of disease. Everywhere he went, great crowds followed him in astonishment.
2. His teaching astonished them – unlike the scribes, he taught with authority as one who truly knew and understood God’s word. They were amazed by his penetrating insights into the law and the human heart.
3. His miracles astonished them. Imagine how you would feel if you were in the crowd when Jesus cleaned a leper with a mere touch of his hand (Matthew 7), or calmed a raging storm with a word (Matthew 8), or raised a little girl from the dead (Matthew 9). It’s no wonder the crowds were amazed and that his fame spread.
4. When Jesus visits his hometown of Nazareth and teaches in its synagogue, we are not surprised to learn that his townspeople are also astonished. But not for long. Their wonder wears off and turns to questions about his family and background. Matthew tells us they “took offense” (v. 57) and refused to believe in him. As a result, “he did not do many mighty works there” (v. 58).

Scene 2: Herod’s Birthday Party (Matthew 14:1-12)

1. Herod Antipas, a son of Herod the Great, governed the region of Galilee. Because John the Baptist had confronted him for unlawfully marrying Herodias (the wife of his half-brother), Herod threw John in prison. But the people honored John the Baptist as a prophet, so Herod was afraid to put him to death.

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2. At his birthday party, Herod is so impressed by the dancing of Salome (daughter of Herodias) that he recklessly promises to give her whatever she wants. Salome (prompted by her mother) asks for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. More concerned about his reputation than about doing the right thing, Herod fulfills his oath and has John beheaded.
3. Matthew tells this gruesome story to help explain Herod's ill-founded profession about Jesus in verse 2. Herod mistakenly assumes Jesus is John the Baptist, raised from the dead.
4. Both Herod and the Jews of Nazareth responded wrongly to Jesus. Their stories illustrate two dangers that we face today.

Danger #1: Familiarity With Jesus Without Faith In Jesus

1. Despite the great authority of Jesus's teaching and the undeniable reports of his power, Nazareth could not get past the fact that they knew his origins, his family. They faced a decision. Would their familiarity with his upbringing lead them to doubt his authority? Or would his authority lead them to reexamine their familiarity?
2. Sadly, they chose to trust in what they "knew." Instead of putting their faith in him, they took offense at him and ultimately rejected him.
3. Familiarity with Jesus without faith in Jesus is dangerous – for us as well as the people of Nazareth. You may have grown up in church and know the Bible inside and out. You may be a student in Christian school who can explain the gospel and give all the right answers. But you are cynical. You have no faith. You place more weight on your own reasoning than on the testimony of Jesus. Like the people of Nazareth you stand in judgment over Jesus rather than let his Word, the Bible, have authority over you.
4. This scene from the synagogue at Nazareth is a warning: the Jesus who seems so familiar to you, the Jesus you are rejecting, is the same authoritative King who calmed the storms and raised the dead. But it's also an invitation. You may have rejected Jesus, but he has not rejected you. Don't let your familiarity with Jesus rob you of faith in Jesus. Turn from your cynicism, turn from your doubts, and place your faith in him!

Danger #2: Knowledge About Jesus Without Knowing Jesus

1. Herod took the little he knew about Jesus and combined it with his own superstitions, false beliefs, and guilty conscience to create a mental image of Jesus that bore no resemblance to the true Jesus. Like trying to do a "color by numbers" painting without knowing which colors go with which numbers, Herod created a distorted mess. And we are in danger of doing the same.

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2. What forms your impressions of Jesus? Things you have read online or heard from teachers and friends? Your own opinions and feelings? If so, your image of Jesus may bear no resemblance to the biblical picture. Your Jesus may accept everyone's lifestyle (because you won't accept a holy God who demands obedience) and welcome people from all religions (because you can't imagine that God would be exclusive). Or you may refuse to have anything to do with Jesus because he didn't give you what you expected.
3. The only way to truly know Jesus is by humbly studying the Bible with a heart ready to follow and obey.

Conclusion

1. Nazareth rejected Jesus because of their unbelief. Herod was mistaken about Jesus because of his wrong belief. Both teach us the same lesson – we need a right belief, a right knowledge, about Jesus. And that comes through the gospel.
2. The gospel reveals that even though we have rejected God and rebelled against him, he has pursued us in love. He has sent his own Son, Jesus, to pay for the penalty of our sin and to offer us the free gift of eternal life in relationship with him. Jesus is the Bread of Life who will satisfy the deepest longings of your soul.
3. Has your familiarity with Jesus undermined your faith in him? Has an erroneous knowledge about Jesus distorted your relationship with him? The remedy is simple. Turn away from the misplaced authority of your own perspective and trust the Bible's testimony about Jesus. Allow Jesus's authoritative teaching and mighty works to speak for themselves. And let the power of the gospel reveal what it means to truly know Jesus.

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read Matthew 13:53-14:12.
2. Who in this group has known and followed Jesus for the longest time? The shortest time? Briefly compare your stories.
3. Have your faith and expectation grown stronger over the years you have known Jesus, or weaker? Explain.
4. If your personal experience does not line up with what you read in the Bible, how do you respond? What are some examples?
5. Is it possible that sources other than the Bible have distorted your understanding of Jesus? If so, what is the remedy?