

## Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

### Sermon Series: Following Where Jesus Leads

(studies in apprenticeships to Jesus from the Gospel of Mark)

### **A Tale of Two Stories**

(Mark 6:1-6)

Study #5

#### Introduction: The stories we tell...

I could start off today by telling you about how I re-planted a bunch of tomatoes last week after the freeze of two weeks ago killed half of my original seedlings.

Or, I could tell you about any of my grandchildren's latest exploits, or about my Tuesday visit to the pharmacy to get a typhoid shot in preparation for a trip to Sierra Leone this summer, or about some courageous, faithful friends here at church who are taking giant next steps with Jesus.

Those are all stories, and to tell a story is to tell about something that has happened. Stories are narratives that entertain and inspire and inform.

A *metastory* / *metanarrative* is different. A *metanarrative* is a story that shapes our understanding of what is. It shapes our expectations of what will be.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> One Internet definition I found, consistent with others: "*Metanarrative - an overarching account or interpretation of events and circumstances that provides a pattern or structure for people's beliefs and gives meaning to their experiences.*"

Metanarratives are formed from our earliest memories, the media, friends, great literature, and elsewhere. They form the box that explains our lives. A metanarrative is our worldview.

*An ancient metanarrative... (from Deuteronomy)*

There is a metanarrative that formed a life "box" for the people of God - the Jews - from the days of Moses forward.

This worldview story surfaces repeatedly in the Old Testament and is most explicitly told in the book of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old Testament, where Moses let the Jewish people know what to expect of life, under God.

The clearest statement of this story is found in Deuteronomy 11. Moses, in speaking to the Jews of his day, said -

***[Deuteronomy 11:26] "See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse: [27] the blessing, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I am commanding you today; [28] and the curse, if you do not listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, but turn aside from the way which I am commanding you today, by following other gods which you have not known."***

Summarizing, if the Jews disobeyed God, they would suffer severe consequences. If they obeyed, God would bless them.

Here, Moses laid out this metanarrative. It was formalized between God and the people when they finally entered the Promised Land and stood in front of two mountains in Israel: Ebal and Gerizim.

Half of the people stood in front of Mount Ebal and called down curses on themselves if they rebelled against His ways. The other half stood in front of Gerizim and recited the blessings that would come if they obeyed.

Everything hung in the balance. Prosperity, health, good harvests, victory over enemies - everything. If they obeyed, there would be tremendous blessings from God. Faithfulness would bring prominence and honor before a watching world.

Rebellion would result in severe discipline, with curses raining down on them.

That was the metanarrative God's people learned and lived under from Moses forward. It was transactional, cut and dried, cause and effect.

That is an Old Testament metanarrative. And we're now going to switch testaments, moving from Old to New, from Moses to Jesus, and will find a whole new metastory.

We're knee deep into a series of studies where we're learning what it means to follow Jesus. In recent weeks, we've focused on the importance of prayer, loving all people, submitting to Jesus' authority, and faith vs fear.

We catch up to Jesus as He journeyed from His base for ministry - the city of Capernaum - to the town in which He was raised.<sup>2</sup>

### **Jesus, the Rejected Messiah**

#### **A Story of Rejection (6:1-6)**

*Coming home (v. 1)*

***[1a] Jesus went out from there and came into His hometown...***

His hometown was Nazareth was located about twenty-five miles from Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee (a distance that seems pretty short, until we remember that He had to walk)

And, in moving from Capernaum to Nazareth, Jesus moved from a relatively large seaside city to a much smaller, less noteworthy village.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Jesus would have used the major trade route leading from the Sea of Galilee westward to Gennesaret to Magadan to Nazareth.

<sup>3</sup> At the most, Nazareth's population was five hundred people. It isn't mentioned in the Old Testament. Nor does the Jewish historian, Josephus, mention it, nor do any

There were large cities in the area of Nazareth. Political rulers had built the cities of Sepphoris and Tiberias nearby, and Nazareth couldn't hold a candle to those grand cities. Jesus had no interest in going there. He wanted to go to Nazareth.

Have disciples, will travel (v. 1b)

***[1b]...and His disciples followed Him.***

Mark wants to make sure that we know the disciples were with Him on this trip. What happens here will form an integral part of their apprenticeship under Jesus. Same for us.

Evidently, since Jesus had gained a reputation as a teacher and a miracle-worker, He was invited to speak on the Sabbath (that would be our Saturday) in the city's synagogue.

*Homecoming reception (vv. 2-3)*

Teaching in the Nazareth synagogue (v. 2a)

***[2a] When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue***

Jesus had grown up with the people who were present that day in the Nazareth synagogue. They were His neighbors and His family. We would have thought it would be a friendly crowd.

It turns out, though, that while He was becoming wildly popular in much of northern Galilee because of His victories over demons, disease, and death, He received a very cool reception in His hometown.

Questioned by the residents of Nazareth (vv. 2b-3)

***[2b]...and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands?"***

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of the extra-biblical writers in the Jewish Talmud. No Christian church was built in Nazareth until the time of Constantine. It was, by any measure, a minor village.

How did Jesus become such a confident speaker? He had been raised to work with His hands. He never went to rabbinical school, but He seemed to know what He was talking about when He spoke from the Law of Moses. There was a wise weightiness behind His words.

And what's up with the signs and wonders?

None of the residents of Nazareth could explain how Jesus got His material. It's good stuff. But, from Jesus?

They reflected, out loud, about what they knew about Jesus.

**[3a] *"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?"***<sup>4</sup>

There was nothing special about His family.

We wonder if these people would have remembered the wild stories surrounding Mary's conception, the out-of-wedlock pregnancy, the hurry-up wedding.<sup>5</sup>

And they knew His line of work. Joseph is not named here, but they knew that Jesus had been trained by Joseph to be a carpenter.<sup>6</sup>

There was nothing insulting about referring to Jesus as a carpenter.

In fact, it would have been a good point of connection, as the whole town was filled with men who worked with their hands. *"Yep. He's just like us."*

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<sup>4</sup> We know James and Judas from elsewhere in the New Testament. James, who wrote the book by the same name, was an early leader in the church (see Acts 15). Judas probably wrote the little New Testament book, "Jude".

<sup>5</sup> Mark's Gospel doesn't explicitly say that Jesus was born of a virgin, but he never denies it, either.

<sup>6</sup> John 6:42 seems to assume that Joseph was still alive when Jesus was an adult. Was Joseph deemed irrelevant? In those days a carpenter was more than (or at least different from) what we think of when we think of "carpenter." The first century carpenter would have worked with all kinds of material - wood, stone, even metal.

The exact point being that Jesus - a Man who was making a claim to be Messiah - wasn't made of the stuff that goes into the making of a Messiah.

**[3b] *...And they took offense at Him.***

Rather than embrace the home-town boy made good, they distanced themselves from Him. They were put off by Him. Their **"astonishment"** (v. 2) is not the astonishment of faith, but of rejection.

We know the old proverb: *"Familiarity breeds contempt."* Jesus quoted another one.

*Dismissed by those who thought they knew Him (vv. 4-6a)*

A proverbial truth (v. 4)

**[4] *Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household."***

Prophets and poets and statesmen are often well-respected abroad. At home, not so much.

Jesus was setting the world on fire everywhere else. In Nazareth, where He was a known quantity, he was dismissed.

They didn't believe in Jesus, and that faithlessness, perhaps surprisingly, allowed for a very limited display of God's power.

Limited power (v. 5)

**[5] *And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them.***

Of the four Gospels, Mark's Gospel most often portrays Jesus in very human ways.

There's no question that Mark identifies Jesus as God's Son. But Mark shows Jesus tired, angry, and disappointed, too.

Here, Jesus found Himself in the presence of faithlessness in His hometown of Nazareth. And, in the absence of faith, Mark says that He was unable to put His powers to maximum use.

Sure, there were some healings, but all small-time stuff. And we are left with no doubt as to the reason for the lack of miracles.

#### Amazing unbelief (v. 6a)

#### **[6a] And He wondered at their unbelief.**

Jesus was amazed. He - who knew Himself to be Messiah - had hoped for better from the people of Nazareth.

**Summary:** A different story for the Messiah

We view this story with the benefit of knowing what the people of Nazareth didn't know. We know that Jesus really was the Messiah.

They knew that He was a fantastic Teacher and a Miracle-worker, but Jesus didn't come with the *flash* or *splash* they expected of the Messiah.

They might have assumed that Messiah would spend all His time in Jerusalem. They sure didn't expect that Messiah would come from or would go to Nazareth. They figured that anyone who would go out of His way to come to their village must not be the Messiah. (talk about poor self-esteem...)

So, we see the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth as an unfortunate, local failure to recognize who He really was.

But it was more than that. The treatment Jesus received in His hometown was a contradiction of, a violation of the metanarrative of the Old Testament that we saw at the beginning from Deuteronomy.

According to what we read there, Jesus, a just and righteous Man, should prosper. He should be blessed, honored, and esteemed. Not rejected.

And Jesus wasn't only a righteous Man. He was the Person the Jews had been eagerly anticipating for centuries. Messiah was the Anointed One who would bring salvation.

But, rejected Jesus was, despite the fact that He was the proof-positive miracle-working Messiah of Israel.

Of all the people in the world who should have been blessed, it was Jesus. But He wasn't blessed at all. It's like God was playing by a different set of rules than He had been playing by for the previous fifteen hundred years when it came to Jesus.

That early rejection in Nazareth was tragic and confusing. But it wasn't an exception to the rule of His life. Rejection was the norm for Jesus, and on three separate occasions He predicted to His disciples His eventual, complete and total rejection by His own people.

#### **Predictions of Rejection**

##### *In Caesarea Philippi (8:27-33)*

The first time was when Jesus and His disciples were near Caesarea Philippi, some thirty miles north of the Sea of Galilee.

He asked the Twelve what people were saying about Him. They told Jesus that some were saying He was John the Baptist, come back from the dead, or Elijah, or one of the prophets.

All the crowds seemed to think that He was somebody special. But He wanted to know what they thought about Him.

So, ever the spokesman for the group, Simon Peter piped up, **"You are the Christ."** (i.e. - Messiah)

To which we all want to shout, *"Way to go, Peter!"* Jesus IS the Messiah. And Messiah meant Healer, Deliverer, Savior, King. With Messiah would come a defeated Rome, financial security, peace and prosperity.

Then, Mark writes that Jesus, [30]...**warned them to tell no one about Him. [31] And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.**

This happened a second time when Jesus and the Twelve were back north, up in Galilee, trying to stay under the radar.

*Back home in Galilee (9:30-32)*

He pulled His disciples aside and told them, [Mark 9:31]...**“The Son of Man is to be delivered<sup>7</sup> into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later.”**

You hear Him refer to Himself as “the Son of Man.” This is a title that an Old Testament prophet would use when referring to the Messiah in the grandest possible terms.<sup>8</sup>

The Son of Man was thought of as a divine figure who would come to earth in glory. The Son of Man rules and reigns. The Son of Man is sovereign.

But Jesus - the self-proclaimed Son of Man - will be killed. A crown may well be in the far distant future; more immediately, there will be a cross.

And He foretold of His coming rejection again for a third time while traveling to Jerusalem for what would be the last time.

*On the way to Jerusalem (10:32-34)*

On this journey Jesus’ travel style differed from the norm. He usually walked *with* the crowds, but on this day, He was walking *ahead* of them, all by Himself.

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<sup>7</sup> The verb does not, in and of itself, mean “betray.” But the context forces that meaning here.

<sup>8</sup> See Daniel’s prophecy where he describes the “son of man” descending in a cloud from heaven (Daniel 7)

At some point, sensing the tension that He had caused by walking ahead, He turned His attention to the twelve, [33] **saying, “Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles<sup>9</sup>; [34] They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him, and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again.”**<sup>10</sup>

Not wanting His followers to be caught unawares, He didn’t pull any punches. He told them exactly how it was all going to play out when they got to Jerusalem.

Jesus, God’s Messiah, would face rejection, something the Old Testament Jews would have never imagined.

Nor would they have imagined what Jesus would have to say about those who followed Him.

Jesus, the One who would be rejected, promised that for those who followed Him, life would not be a bed of roses.

### **Expectations for the Followers of a Rejected Messiah**

#### **A Pointed Parable (4:1-20)**

For a variety of reasons, of all of Jesus’ parables, my favorite is His story of the sower and the seed.

This parable tells the story of a farmer / sower who sowed his seed on four different types of soils, producing different harvests.<sup>11</sup>

Jesus told this story to the large crowds of people who had gathered around Him (4:1-8) and He later explained it to His disciples in private. (vv. 14ff...)

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<sup>9</sup> For these Jews to be told that Jesus would be handed over to the Gentiles would have added more terror. To have the Gentiles kill a Jew WAS to be crucified - that was what the Gentiles (the Romans) did when they killed a Jew.

<sup>10</sup> See Isaiah 53; Psalm 22.

<sup>11</sup> This parable is also found in Matthew (chapter 13) and Luke (chapter 8).

The interpretation of the parable is pretty straightforward.

The *seed* represents the message about Jesus. The *sower* stands for the one who shares the message about Jesus with someone else. These two elements in the parable are static.

The only element that changes is the *soil*, which is a symbol for the heart of the one who is hearing the message that the sower is sharing. There are four different soil / soul types.

The first is the man or the woman who hears the Word but doesn't receive it. They reject it. They don't really even listen. (v. 15)

The second is the person who gladly receives the message. But he or she wilts under pressure. Their soul is shallow. They don't bear fruit for God. (vv. 16-17)

The third soil stands for the person who hears the message and doesn't bear fruit because **[19] "...the worries of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful.**

And the fourth soil type represents the one who brings a smile to God's face. This person produces a harvest and bears fruit.

It's a good story - and I believe Jesus explained it to His disciples in private, away from the crowds, for a very specific reason.

He didn't tell this parable to enable His disciples to identify, based on their responses to the message, who is or isn't saved.<sup>12</sup>

Neither the words nor the themes nor the explanation of the parable relate to eternal life. At no point does Jesus refer to salvation or faith or belief or trust or grace or justification.

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<sup>12</sup> There is nothing to suggest that Jesus' purpose in telling the parable was so that His followers could figure out the eternal destiny of the four soils. Neither the words nor the themes related to that issue crop up in this parable or in Jesus' explanation. We don't read "saved" "eternal life" "faith/believe/trust" "Heaven/Hell" "grace" or "condemnation" here.

Jesus gave this parable to assure the disciples that as they went out to sow the seed of the Gospel, the message will be, more often than not, disbelieved. They will be, much more often than not, rejected.

Jesus was equipping His followers with a realistic, anti-Deuteronomic, anti-Old Covenant expectation for what will follow as they follow Him.

You and I need to hear this.

Faithfully sowing the seed of the Gospel will bring a mixed response from those who hear.

We can certainly expect that some will receive the message and will bear fruit for God. But many will hear and fall away. Many will reject outright both the message we bring and us.

Our job is to sow God's message as lovingly and as graciously and as wisely and as widely as we can. But we need to know in advance that not everybody is going to respond the way we wish they would.

As time went on, Jesus made this point about rejection increasingly clear to His followers.

### Pointed Warnings

*On a ministry tour (6:7-13)*

When He sent the disciples, two-by-two, on a ministry tour throughout Israel to cast out demons, heal diseases, and preach the Good News.

He told them to expect that not everyone in every place would welcome them with open arms.

***[Mark 6:10] And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. [11] "Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them."***

### *Gains and losses (10:28-31)*

When Simon Peter reminded Jesus of all they had given up for Him, Jesus promised, **[Mark 10:29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, [30] but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, ALONG WITH PERSECUTIONS (emphasis added); and in the age to come, eternal life.”**

### *A baptism (10:35-39)*

When the brothers, James and John, told Jesus that they wanted seats of honor in His coming kingdom, Jesus instead promised that they would be baptized with a baptism of suffering. (Mark 10:35-39)

### *(un)Civil sufferings (13:9ff)*

And when speaking to His followers during the last week of His life, He warned them, **[Mark 13:9] “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.”**

These aren’t the verses we typically find on greeting cards, but they’re true and valid for us who follow Jesus.

The metanarrative we read about at the beginning from the book of Deuteronomy was for Old Testament Jews. That wasn’t the metanarrative for Jesus and it isn’t ours, either.

Our larger story doesn’t give us a worldview that guarantees earthly blessing for obedience to God. Often, it will be just the opposite.

Jesus’ *words* are given directly to and for us. They forewarn and forearm us. And so is Jesus’ *experience* recorded for our benefit.

The earliest disciples were put on notice about what lay ahead for them as they watched Him walk through the last week of His life, where He faced rejection after rejection after rejection.

### **III. The Metanarrative of Jesus (Mark 11ff...)**

He triumphantly entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, with crowds shouting, **“Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the Lord!”**

Then, upon entering the city, He cleansed the temple of its flea market buying and selling. Opposition from the religious elite rose to a whole new level, as Mark writes, **[18a] The chief priests and the scribes...began seeking how to destroy Him.**

In the middle of that last week, Jesus had conflicts with every leadership group in Israel. He went toe-to-toe with chief priests, scribes and elders (11:17-33), Pharisees and Herodians (12:13-17), and Sadducees (12:18-27). And after these confrontations, His opponents were committed to putting Him to death.

One evening, again, during His last week, Jesus was anointed by a woman with very expensive perfume in the home of Simon the Leper in the town of Bethany. Jesus gratefully accepted her act of worship.

Several of the disciples objected to the woman’s extravagantly wasteful act. Judas Iscariot was so offended that he went straight to the priests to arrange to hand Jesus over to them.

As Mark continues to tell Jesus’ story, we see the downward spiral of His arrest, His denial by Peter, His trials before Romans and Jews, His conviction and scourging and death by crucifixion.

## **Conclusion:**

The rules of the game have indeed changed from the arrangement under Moses.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, Israel was promised curses if they rebelled against God and great blessing for obedience.

With Jesus' example and teaching, we learn that we can expect persecution, trials, and rejection. But our Christian metanarrative is more than that.

Jesus' story didn't end with crucifixion. And rejection isn't at all the whole story for us.

The tomb was empty on that first Sunday morning because Jesus was gloriously resurrected. And everything changed for the disciples when they saw a risen Jesus.

He ascended into heaven, was welcomed back to glory, and now is seated at His Father's right hand.

Yes, we who follow Jesus follow Him into a challenging life where there are no guarantees of health and prosperity and where there is a likelihood of rejection and suffering.

Jesus' words and life have made the case for that already this morning.

But...our WHOLE story says -

- that we have all the resources of the Holy Spirit to lead a life of God-honoring obedience;
- that the life of following Jesus is full of meaning and purpose as we have the commission to make disciples and the commandment to love as we have been loved by God;
- that following Jesus means that we are surrounded by a community of life-minded friends who are on the same journey of faith.

And faithfully following Jesus means that we can anticipate a "*Well done!*" at the end from our living, loving Lord!