

Popular Perceptions of Jesus

As we go through life, we are continually evaluating those around us.

It's not because we're critical, although sometimes we can be.

It's just our way of sensing our surroundings.

And these perceptions, be they right or wrong, profoundly affect the way we react to ours.

So it's not surprising that someone who was in the public eye as much as Jesus would be subject to a great deal of scrutiny.

And as you might have noticed, people's opinions of others often reveal more about themselves than the ones they are evaluating.

And certainly this was the case when Jesus visited His hometown of Nazareth.

Let's begin reading at Mark 6:1 **"Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him."**

Actually, this was Jesus' second return visit to Nazareth.

And between His first and second visit, people's opinions had run the full gamut

Certainly, many regarded Him as a great prophet and a marvellous healer, and some even thought He was the embodiment of Elijah or Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

And then there were a few who were convinced He was their long awaited Messiah.

But one thing was certain.

By the time He made His second visit to Nazareth, He had become quite a national figure.

In fact, Matthew 4:23 tells us that after His temptations in the wilderness, and after He recruited His first four disciples, He had gone **"about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people."**

Did you notice the area in which all this activity was taking place?

Yes, He had been going about **"all Galilee,"** the very province in which His home town was located.

And not only was that significant, but so was the reception He was receiving.

As Matthew 4:24-25 records, **"---His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-**

**possessed, epileptics, and paralytics;
and He healed them."**

So, as you might expect, **"Great multitudes followed Him--from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan."**

Let's take a moment to locate the source of these great multitudes.

Geographically speaking, Galilee, which was Jesus' center of operation, is Israel's most northerly province, and is located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.

And then, on the eastern shore of this same body of water, and down along the eastern bank of the Jordan, there is quite a large tract of land called Decapolis.

Translated from the Greek language, the name Decapolis means 10 cities, and refers to the 10 cities that had been built by the

Greeks on this tract of land in former days.

Another interesting feature of Decapolis is that it included the country of the Gadarenes where Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, sending the evil spirits into a herd of swine.

And, as you might have guessed, it was completely inhabited by Gentiles.

So then, even though Jesus' message was for the Jews, His ministry of healing was attracting a great many Gentiles.

And then, of course, the residents of Judea and Jerusalem, who were mostly Jewish, were making the long trek north to hear this mighty Prophet.

And, in fact, His ministry was even attracting those beyond the Jordan.

So you could safely say, Jesus' public ministry had *mobilized* the entire area.

No wonder Paul would remind Festus that

"this thing was not done in a corner".

And no wonder, when the high priest questioned Jesus about His disciples and doctrine, as if He had been leading some sort of secret society, He would answer --
"I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing."

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So then, even when Jesus made His first trip to Nazareth, which is recorded in Luke Chapter 4, there was no way the residents could have been unaware of these earthshaking events.

And they might have been willing to accept Him as a prophet, but that wasn't the point Jesus was trying to make.

You see, **"as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah."**

As you will notice, the rulers of the synagogue chose a prophet to be read that day, which would be their prerogative, but Jesus chose the *place* where He would begin.

And it was obvious, as He continued to unwind and wind this rather large scroll, that He had a particular place in mind.

Finally, He started to read at Isaiah 61:1-2, where it says ---**"The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound; To proclaim the**

acceptable year of the LORD," . . . and
that's where He stopped.

Not at the end of a sentence, but at a
comma.

And today, that comma is over 2000 years
old.

You see, the very next words---"**And the day
of vengeance of our God**" and so on,
described His second coming, when He will
to destroy Israel's enemies, whereas the
part He read that day in the synagogue
referred to His first coming as Israel's
Messiah.

And then Luke 4:20 tells us, "**He closed the
book, and gave *it* back to the attendant
and sat down.**"

You could almost hear a pin drop.

And, in the astonished silence that
prevailed, Jesus said---"**Today this
Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**"

There was no mistaking His meaning.

The Scripture had been fulfilled because He had fulfilled it.

Well, things moved quite quickly after that.

V 28-29 **"---all those in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust Him out of the city; and they led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, that they might throw Him down over the cliff."**

And it was only because of His supernatural powers that He was able to escape sudden death.

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So this morning, as we begin Mark Chapter 6 and Jesus' second visit to Nazareth, which might have occurred about a year later, we can't help wondering what His reception would be like.

Mark 6:1 "Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him."

By this time, His popularity and His opposition had grown considerably, and by this time 12 disciples were following Him.

V 2-3 "And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing *Him* were astonished, saying, "Where *did* this Man get these things? And what wisdom *is* this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! "Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?" And they were offended at Him."

Certainly, they couldn't deny His mighty works.

The whole country was buzzing with the news!
Nor could they ignore the wisdom with which
He spoke.

But somehow this whole thing just didn't
make sense!

Hadn't He been their local carpenter?
And didn't they know His entire family?

"Where did this Man get these things?"

That's when Jesus made an observation that
hit the nail on the head--- **"A prophet is
not without honor except in his own
country, among his own relatives, and in
his own house."**

Yes, right in the middle of this sea of
national acclaim, there was a little
pocket of *unbelief* that could not be
conquered.

And V 6 tells us Jesus **"---marveled because
of their unbelief."**

Isn't that amazing?

Here was the Creator of all things, the One who **"did not consider it robbery to be equal with God,"** and yet He was absolutely astonished at the reaction of these people.

Actually, there are two things recorded in scripture that caused Jesus to marvel. The one was the *unbelief* of His neighbours, and the other was the unqualified *belief* of a Gentile.

Remember the centurion who said, **"---only speak a word, and my servant will be healed."**

Well, when Jesus heard that, **"He marveled, and said to those who followed, "Assuredly, I say to you, I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!"**

No, not in Israel, and certainly not in Nazareth!

So, as a result, **“---He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed *them*.”**

And, by the way, that was the *last time* He officially visited Nazareth.

However, He did continue His public ministry all around them.

Mark 6:6-7 **“Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching. And He called the twelve to *Himself*, and began to send them out two *by two*, and gave them power over unclean spirits.”**

Now, we shouldn't confuse the disciples' message with the Gospel message our Christian missionaries are sent out with today.

No, the disciples were on a *different* mission and with a *different* message.

They were preaching the gospel of the kingdom in fulfillment of God's promise to Israel.

It was a message that had been first proclaimed by John the Baptist---"**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!**"

It was also the message found on the lips of the Lord Jesus.

Matthew 4:17 "**From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."**

And now, in Mark 6:12, the disciples "**went out and preached that people should repent.**"

Yes, the disciples were heralds of the kingdom, and they were to be treated with due respect.

In fact, they were to be *provided* for.

That's why, in Mark 6:8, Jesus "---**commanded them to take nothing for the journey**

except a staff--no bag, no bread, no copper in *their* money belts-- but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place."

And there were consequences for those who would reject them.

"And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!"

However, the day would come when these same disciples would receive a *different* message with *different* instructions.

Luke 22:35-37 "And He said to them, "When I sent you without money bag, knapsack, and

sandals, did you lack anything?" So they said, "Nothing." Then He said to them, "But now, he who has a money bag, let him take *it*, and likewise a knapsack; and he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one. "For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: 'And He was numbered with the transgressors.' For the things concerning Me have an end."

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And then, as we return to Mark Chapter 6, we come across another and a very unusual perception of Jesus.

V 14-16 "Now King Herod heard *of Him*, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the

Prophet, or like one of the prophets."

(Yes, there were lots of opinions) **But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"**

Sounds like a man with a guilty conscience, doesn't it?

Now, in order not to confuse this man with the other Herods found in scripture, let me point out that this was Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great, that awful man who slaughtered all the male babies in Bethlehem.

And his son had been a bit of a renegade also.

In fact, Herod Antipas had stolen Herodias, his brother Philip's wife.

And it was a sin that John the Baptist sharply rebuked --- **"It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."**

And I think Herod would have left it at that, for he **“---feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly.”**

But Herodias was another story.

And like King Ahab, who was so influenced by his evil wife, Jezebel, Herod was greatly influenced by Herodias.

So, for her sake, he put John in prison.

That was step one, and step two would soon follow.

On Herod's birthday, the daughter of Herodias danced before the king and his guests . . . and drunkenness and the lust of the flesh did the rest.

Herod promised her *anything* she wanted, and influenced by her mother, she asked for the head of John the Baptist!

Certainly, scripture tells us Herod **"was exceedingly sorry,"** but apparently, not sorry enough to do the right thing.

So, rather than lose face in front of his friends, he ordered the execution of an innocent man.

And now, still haunted by that event, he was convinced that Jesus was **"John the Baptist"** risen **"from the dead."**

It was a twisted perception generated by a guilty conscience.

But strange as it might seem, Herod actually *wanted* to meet Jesus.

And he finally got his wish.

During Jesus' trial before Pilate, it was discovered that Jesus was a Galilean, which would put Him in Herod's jurisdiction.

Consequently, Pilate **"sent Him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time."**

We pick up the account in Luke 23: 8-11---

"Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long *time* to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked *Him*, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate."

Yes, after all his expectations, Jesus turned out to be a disappointment.

Not only did He refuse to respond to Herod's many clever questions, but He didn't perform a single miracle.

Nor did He defend Himself against His adversaries.

That's when Herod's admiration turned to contempt.

And dressing Him in a gorgeous robe, he sent this would-be ruler back to Pilate.

Strange, isn't it?

There was a time when Herod admired both of these men, but he ended up *murdering* the one in *mocking* the other.

And history tells us that having fallen out of favour with Rome, he ended his days in exile.

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Mark 6:30-32 **"Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught. And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to**

eat. So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves."

I'm sure the disciples had been running on adrenaline, but now it was time for a rest.

And God understands our need for rest.

In fact, He has woven it into our very lives.

Yes, every 24 hours includes a time of rest, whether we take advantage of it or not.

And one day out of seven is set aside for a rest from the daily grind.

And even the *land* of milk and honey that God gave to Israel, was supposed to have a rest.

Leviticus 25:3-4 **"Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; 'but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a**

sabbath to the LORD. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard."

And so, in the midst of such activity that there wasn't even time to eat, Jesus called a halt.

Mark 6:32-33 **"So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves. But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him."**

Now, we're not told what the disciples' reaction was, but I don't think they were very pleased with this overbearing crowd. But Jesus, who must have been as tired as the rest of them, didn't see the crowd that way.

No, He saw them with the eyes of a shepherd, and He **"was moved with compassion for**

them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd."

And sheep without a shepherd would be hungry, because there was no one to lead them to green pastures, and sheep without a shepherd would be thirsty, because there was no one to lead them beside the still waters.

And not only that, but they would need a shepherd to lead them in the paths of righteousness.

So V 34 tells us **"---He began to teach them many things."**

However, as the day wore on, their spiritual need was replaced by a physical need.

And the disciples, being the practical men they were, had some practical advice to offer.

V 35-36 **"---This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late. "Send them**

away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

Yes, it was practical advice, but it could have been offered by someone with as little faith as the residents of Nazareth.

"But He answered and said to them, "You give them something to eat."

The disciples couldn't believe their ears! Did He really want them to feed all these people?

"Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them *something* to eat?"

They might have said, Don't you realize how impractical that suggestion is?

Just one denarii is equivalent to a day's wages, and it would take 200 of them to feed this crowd.

But Jesus wouldn't be deterred by their objections, and said---"**How many loaves do you have? Go and see.**" And when they found out they said, "**Five, and two fish.**"

That rather proved their point, didn't it? In fact, Andrew couldn't help adding ---"**but what are they among so many?**"

Maybe it was time to stop looking at their *provisions* and started looking at their *Provider*.

Maybe their perception of Jesus needed an upgrade.

And, in fact, Jesus was already working on that.

John 6:5-6 "**---and seeing a great multitude coming toward Him, He said to Philip,**

"Where shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" But this He said to test him, for He Himself knew what He would do."

Yes, it was a test.

Jesus already knew what He would do.

And Jesus *always* knows what He will do.

The question is, Do we always know . . .

that Jesus always knows . . . what to do?

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Mark 6:39-41 **"Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties. And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave *them* to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among *them* all."**

Here we see the divine order of Christian service.

Jesus provides the miracle, and we provide
the leg work.

Jesus is the Bread of Life, and we are His
servants.

And when we get that right, there will
always be more than enough.

V 42-44 **"So they all ate and were filled.**

**And they took up twelve baskets full of
fragments and of the fish. Now those who
had eaten the loaves were about five
thousand men."**

Yes, there were leftovers.

Just like His Heavenly Father, Who is **"able
to do exceedingly abundantly above all
that we ask or think,"** Jesus will always
surpass our expectations.

However, with all this abundance, John's
gospel tells us something else about
Jesus.

Yes, John 6:12 says . . . when the meal was over, Jesus told His disciples to **"Gather up the fragments that remain, so that nothing is lost."**

Abundance, yes, but Jesus doesn't believe in waste.

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Mark 6:45 **"Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away."**

Certainly, there is a sense of urgency here, for as John 6:15 tells us, **"Jesus perceived that they were about to come and take Him by force to make Him king."**

Once again, the multitude's perception of Jesus was wrong.

God had sent their Messiah, but all they could see was a zealot who could free them from Rome.

Mark 6:46 **"And when He had sent them away,
He departed to the mountain to pray."**

In spite of a very long day, Jesus felt the need for prayer.

And there was so much to pray about.

He longed to gather His people together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but they were not willing.

And their religious leaders, the guardians of God's Word, were His sworn enemies.

Blind leaders of the blind, He called them.

And at this very moment, His disciples were in the midst of a violent storm.

V 47-48 **"Now when evening came, the boat was in the middle of the sea; and He was alone on the land. Then He saw them straining at rowing, for the wind was against them."**

No, His disciples were never out of His thoughts, and apparently, never out of His sight.

And being determined to follow their Master's directions, they were "**straining at rowing,**" but they weren't getting very far.

In fact, it was the fourth watch of the night, or three in the morning, and they had only gone 3 or 4 miles.

Now, for experienced rowers, that isn't very far.

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Certainly, I'm not an experienced rower or an experienced anything else when it comes to boats, but I can appreciate their dilemma.

In fact, I can remember the time, when the children were small, when Eleanor and I took a short trip in a row boat.

We knew we were greenhorns, so we determined to stay close to shore.

However, it wasn't long before the beautiful weather we had started out in turned nasty.

And not only that, but the wind and the waves were driving us away from the shore.

Actually, I had to row as hard as I could just to stand still.

However, just when I realized just how helpless we were, the Lord sent a man in a motor boat who towed us back to shore. But the disciples weren't trying to get back to the shore, were they?

They were trying to reach the *other* side.

They were trying to go to Bethsaida, but the wind was against them.

And no doubt it was when they realized just how helpless they were, that V 48 tells

us, **"He came to them, walking on the sea."**

Now, that was encouraging, but what about the rest of this verse which says He **"would have passed them by."**

Do you really think the Good Shepherd, Who summed up His earthly ministry with the words---**"and none of them is lost"**--- would have passed them by?

Would He have walked right past them and let them sink?

I don't think so.

So, why does it say He **"would have passed them by?"**

Well, there were a couple of other accounts about Jesus passing by, and they might suggest a possible reason for this tactic.

Remember the blind man who was sitting by the road side begging when **"Jesus of Nazareth was passing by"**?

And in spite of the fact that the crowd told him to be quiet, he continued to shout---

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

No, he didn't stop . . . but Jesus did . . . and He called the blind man to Him.

Then He asked him a most unusual question.

Looking at the blind man, He asked ---**"What do you want Me to do for you?"**

And when the man gave Him the obvious answer, Jesus said---**"Receive your sight; your faith has made you well."**

So, was Jesus really passing by, and did He really need the answer to such an obvious question?

I don't think so.

He was giving the blind man an opportunity to exercise his faith.

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And then there were those two men on the road to Emmaus.

Certainly they had enjoyed Jesus' company, but when **"they drew near to the village where they were going"**---**"He indicated that He would have gone farther."**

Yes, He was about to pass by.

And it wasn't because He was in a hurry.

No, He was waiting for an *invitation*.

So, when the disciples said **"Abide with us, for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent"** He did, and they received an unexpected blessing.

And when we are burdened down with troubles, I wonder how many times we just keep rowing, and let Jesus pass by?

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Mark 6:49-50 **"And when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed it was a ghost,**

and cried out; for they all saw Him and were troubled. But immediately He talked with them and said to them, "Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid."

And, of course, that suggests a more practical reason why Jesus would have passed by.

When the disciples first saw Him, He was too far away to be recognized, so of course they thought He was a ghost.

Who else would be out walking in the middle of the sea?

Now suppose it really was a ghost passing by at some distance.

That would be scary enough, wouldn't?

But suppose that ghost was heading *straight* for your boat?

Too scary to think about, isn't it?

So perhaps Jesus chose to pass by at a safe distance, and the moment they spotted

Him, He would call out **"Be of good cheer!
It is I; do not be afraid."**

V 51 **"Then He went up into the boat to them,
and the wind ceased. And they were
greatly amazed in themselves beyond
measure, and marveled."**

Yes, this miracle really amazed them.

In a way, they had gotten used to Jesus as a
healer.

They had seen hundreds of people made whole
on many occasions.

But they never *dreamed* He could walk on
water, or still the mighty storm.

As a matter of fact, V 52 tells us **"---they
had not understood about the loaves,
because their heart was hardened."**

Clearly, their limited perception of Jesus
needed to change . . . and it was about
to do so.

Yes, Matthew's Gospel tells us that when He got into the boat, His disciples **"worshiped Him, saying, "Truly You are the Son of God."**

And if for no other reason, that made that harrowing experience all worthwhile.

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V 53-56 **"When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment.**

And as many as touched Him were made well."

Certainly, these people believed Jesus had the power to heal them, and they were prepared to put their faith into action. Actually, it's hard to imagine the scene as Jesus walked into village after village and town after town to find the sick lining the streets . . . and there wasn't an *unbeliever* among them!

All they asked was **"that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well."**

Yes, all of them were healed, because *all* of them believed.

Contrast that multitude to the unbelieving residents of Nazareth where Jesus **"could do no mighty work,"** and you've got a lesson in the proper perception of Jesus.

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So then, in a single chapter, we have witnessed a *proper* perception, a total *lack of perception*, a *misguided* perception, and a *distorted* perception of Jesus, as in the case of Herod.

And as we have observed in the beginning of this lesson, people's opinions often reveal a great deal more about themselves than the ones they are evaluating.

And certainly, in the case of the Lord Jesus, people's opinions will determine their eternal destiny.

For as John 3:36 tells us--- **"He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."**

And even in the case of a Christian, our perception of Jesus will make a profound difference in our lives.

In fact, it will make the difference between
a victorious life in Christ . . . and 40
years in the wilderness.