

Hometown Blues  
 Mark 6:1-6  
 ABC 2/26/23

The story is told of a man on Long Island who received by mail on Sept 21, 1938, a barometer bought a few days earlier in New York. When he opened it he found the instrument's needle pointing at the section of the dial marked *Tornadoes and Hurricanes*. He shook the barometer and banged it with his fist, but the needle refused to move, so he rewrapped it, enclosed a note of complaint, and carried it to the local post office. Later that day his home was demolished, by hurricane.<sup>1</sup> This hurricane resulted in 700 deaths & approximately 63,000 were left homeless.

Unbelief has tremendous consequences. This morning, as we continue our study through Mark's gospel, we're going to witness the tragedy of unbelief. We'll see some who should have put their faith in Jesus but instead turned away; some who should have embraced Jesus, but instead rejected Him. Leading up to our text, Mk 6:1-6, we've seen Jesus perform a series of powerful miracles demonstrating His authority as He calmed the storm, cast out a legion of demons, healed the woman with a chronic illness, & raised a 12-yr-old girl back to life (4:35-5:43). The last 2 of these miracles involved faith. He told the woman, **Daughter, your faith has made you well** (5:34) & He told Jarius, **Do not be afraid *any longer*, only believe** (5:36). Up to this point in Mark's gospel, Jesus' ministry has been around Capernaum & the Sea of Galilee. Now we find He leaves & heads to His hometown of Nazareth. Joseph & Mary had moved there after they returned from Egypt when Jesus was still a small child (Mt 2:23; Lk 2:39). This visit to Nazareth was Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> recorded visit there since starting His public ministry. His 1<sup>st</sup> visit occurred shortly after His temptations in the wilderness. As Luke records, **Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about Him spread through all the surrounding district. & He *began* teaching in their synagogues and was praised by all. & He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read** (4:14-16). Jesus was known to those attending the synagogue that day. They'd known Him since He was a child. To them, He was an ordinary member of their small-town community. But that Sabbath would prove to be far from ordinary. It was normal for traveling rabbis to be invited to the synagogue to read the Scriptures & address the congregation. Because word about Jesus had been spreading, the people of Nazareth

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.americanheritage.com/38-hurricane>

were undoubtedly eager to hear Him preach. After reading the messianic passage from Isaiah 61:1–2, Jesus told His friends & neighbors, **Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing** (Lk 4:21). By this He was claiming to be the Messiah. Initially, the people’s response seemed positive: **All were speaking well of Him, & wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; & they were saying, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’** (22). But Jesus knew this was a superficial desire to see Him perform miracles (23). When He rebuked their faithlessness & hypocrisy, comparing them to the rebellious generation of Israelites who lived during the days of Elijah & Elisha (25–27), they reacted & revealed the true condition of their hearts. **All the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; & they got up & drove Him out of the city, & led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff** (28–29). After just one sermon, people who’d known Jesus His whole life were so annoyed by Him they turned into a mob wanting to kill Him. They wanted to toss their hometown boy off a cliff. But, as Luke reports, He escaped, & **passing through their midst, He went His way** (30). Some months later, we read in Mk 3, some of His family came from Nazareth attempted to **take custody of Him; for they were saying, “He has lost His senses”** (21). Jesus was rejected by His family & His hometown. If it were me, I’d never want to go back. But Jesus doesn’t give up on them. In our text today Jesus returns to Nazareth for a 2<sup>nd</sup> & final time. **1-6**

Leaving Capernaum & the Sea of Galilee area, **Jesus went out from there & came into His hometown** (1). Nazareth was a small, insignificant town located about 25 miles southwest of Capernaum, half way between the Mediterranean & the Sea of Galilee. Nazareth isn’t mentioned in the OT, the Jewish Talmud, or by Josephus. It was a small, obscure village in a backwater, out of the way location. Nathanael asked scornfully, **can any good thing come out of Nazareth** (Jn 1:44)? Built on a rocky hillside, it covered a mere 60 acres with a population of not more than 500 people.<sup>2</sup> Having grown up here, Jesus probably knew everyone there & they knew Him. Mark tells us, **His disciples followed Him** as part of their ongoing training (6:7–13).

**1. Hometown Reception** (2-3) We see a 3-fold reception to Jesus here in His hometown.

<sup>2</sup> R. C. Sproul, *Mark*, First Edition, St. Andrew’s Expository Commentary, p 116

**A. Astonishment** Custom allowed any qualified male to speak in the synagogue by invitation of the synagogue leaders. Jesus' status as a *hometown boy* would have made this a special occasion as they gave Him a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance. How was He received? The **listeners were astonished** by Him (2). **Astonished** means *to strike* or *to blast*. In other words, His teaching was mind-blowing for those who heard. They freely acknowledged that Jesus' teaching & miracles they'd heard about were amazing. But don't give them too much credit. They're impressed, but don't know what to make of Jesus & can't explain the source of His authority, His wisdom, or His miraculous powers. The problem was they knew Jesus. They knew He hadn't studied under any of the great rabbis &, in their minds, He wasn't qualified to be a teacher. They didn't understand that it was the incarnate Word of God who was teaching them. They've heard the buzz about Jesus. They've heard of His miracles. They knew He had no rabbinical, theological training & yet His teaching was unlike others. His teaching was authoritative (Mt 7:28–29), knowledgeable (Jn 7:15–16), & unmatched (Jn 7:46). Understandably, their response was astonishment. Yet, their amazement didn't lead them to put their faith in Him as Lord & Messiah. Instead, they hardened their hearts in continued rejection. Rather than recognizing the obvious, that Jesus was empowered by God & was God in human flesh, they questioned the source of His wisdom & power. They weren't willing to acknowledge that His power came from God. Their doubt & disbelief is expressed in a series of questions. Like the hard soil along the path in the parable of the soils (Mk 4:15), their hearts were impenetrable. They'd been given more than enough evidence but refused to believe. The needle of the barometer was pointing to Jesus as Messiah but they refused to believe it.

**B. Questions** Though they were astonished by His teaching & amazed by the reports of His miracles, they refused to believe that He was anything but a hometown boy. No one apparently noticed Him as a prodigy or says to Him: *I always knew You would grow up to be the Messiah.*<sup>3</sup> In keeping with their disbelief, they raised issues that weren't relevant to the question at hand. **2-3**

It was true that Jesus was a carpenter by trade, the 1<sup>st</sup>-born son of Mary, & the half-brother of His siblings. But those details had nothing to do with the issue of His messiahship. While the 1<sup>st</sup>-century

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<sup>3</sup> David E. Garland, *Mark*, The NIV Application Commentary, p 235

Jews had many misconceptions about the Messiah's coming, they understood He'd be born as a man & grow up in a Jewish family. Rather than embracing Jesus as that promised & proven Messiah & praising God for choosing their obscure village for such an honor, they responded with resentment, derision, & disbelief.

**A. Where did this man get these things...?** They don't use His name but refer to Him as **this man** in a derogatory way. They won't even use His name.

**B. What is this wisdom given to Him...?** He's wiser than a carpenter from Nazareth should be. Where did He gain such wisdom?

**C. How are such miracles... performed by His hands?** They watched Him grow up & had never seen any inkling that He could perform miracles. *How could **this man** be doing these things?*

**D. Is not this the carpenter...?** This can mean *wood-worker, stone mason*, or anyone involved in the craft of building. He probably worked with both wood & stone as builders in His day produced all sorts of things, from houses to cabinets to yokes & plows. When Jesus was a young man, Herod Antipas inherited part of the kingdom of his father, Herod the Great. He set out to rebuild the city of Sepphoris, just a few miles north of Nazareth, to serve as the regional capital of Galilee & build a palace for himself. He hired craftsmen & laborers from around the area to build his city. It's possible that those he hired included Joseph & Jesus. It's interesting to speculate that Jesus may have worked on this project for a man who would later question & mock Him (Lk 23:6-12).<sup>4</sup> Whatever the case, Jesus learned His trade from Joseph & likely took over the family business after Joseph died. While manual labor was viewed as degrading by most Greeks,<sup>5</sup> Jews considered working with their hands to be a noble profession, & a **carpenter** would have been an essential & respected occupation in village life. The people aren't saying, *He's nothing but a common laborer*, but rather, *He's no better, no different, than anyone of us*.<sup>6</sup> Jesus had likely made things for His neighbors but these same people found it hard to believe that a **carpenter** from their humble hometown could have such insight & authority. Though many legends about Jesus' childhood arose

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<sup>4</sup> Sproul, p 117

<sup>5</sup> Origen, *Cels.* 6.34, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT, p 242

later, claiming He performed miracles as a boy in Nazareth, they're obviously fabrications. If any of that was true, the people of Nazareth would've probably responded to Him differently. But Jesus' life growing up seemed so ordinary & natural to His neighbors & friends that they found it impossible to think of Him as possessing divine wisdom & supernatural power.<sup>7</sup>

**E. Is not this the son of Mary?** This is the only place in the gospels where Jesus is referred this way. The normal Jewish practice identified a son by His father's name. He'd be known as Jesus bar Joseph (son of Joseph). This could be an insult, implying He'd been born illegitimately (Jn 8:41; 9:29), that Mary conceived Him out of wedlock. Perhaps they were saying: *Isn't He the carpenter who was the son of that woman? We know that family.* If so, this comment is nothing short of ridicule. At the very least, they were saying they knew His family & upbringing. There was nothing special about it.

**F. Is not this the... brother of James & Joses & Judas & Simon?** We don't know much about Jesus' siblings, but one of the things we do know is that during His public ministry, they weren't believers (Jn 7:5). James, or *Jacob*, was likely the oldest of the 4 brothers since he's mentioned 1<sup>st</sup>. He's the most prominent of Jesus' brothers in the NT. Paul refers to a resurrection appearance of Jesus to him (1 Cor 15:7) & identifies him as a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church (Gal 1:19; 2:9, 12). He appears in Acts as the senior leader of the church & renders the decision at the council of Jerusalem (Acts 12:17; 15:13–21; 21:18). He's also the author of the NT letter bearing his name. Both the Jewish historian Josephus & the early church historian Eusebius record his martyrdom. Judas, who we know as Jude, is identified as the author of the letter of Jude, where he identifies himself as a **brother of James** (Jude 1). We know nothing about Joseph & Simon. But Luke tells us Jesus' brothers were with the small band of believers after His resurrection (Acts 1:14), implying that they all came to faith in Jesus. But at this time, when Jesus returned to Nazareth, His own brothers & sisters didn't understand or support Him.

**G. Are not His sisters here with us?** The way this is worded, these unnamed sisters were probably married & living in Nazareth. It's likely the people of Nazareth knew how Jesus' siblings felt about

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<sup>7</sup> John MacArthur, *Mark 1–8*, MacArthur NT Commentary, p 276

Him. If so, it would have only added to their suspicion of Him. By raising these questions, the people of Nazareth turned irrelevant issues into stumbling blocks to defend their unbelief. They diverted their attention away from the truth in order to justify their rejection of Jesus. They were unwilling to embrace Him for who He truly was & is: the Son of God in human flesh, the Messiah. They relied on what their natural minds told them. Thomas Paine, the great American patriot, wrote this: *I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church.*<sup>8</sup> The people of Nazareth responded much the same way. *How can someone so ordinary do marvels & speak wisdom? How can this One who is so familiar to us be God's anointed?* It's almost as if they themselves admit that nothing this good can come from Nazareth. As a result of their contempt, **they took...**

**C. Offense** at Jesus. The word **offense** means *to snare* or *cause to stumble*. It occurs 8x in Mark & each time it's used of obstacles that hinder one from coming to faith & following Jesus.<sup>9</sup> During His earlier visit, Jesus had offended them (Lk 4:28) by claiming to be the Messiah (21) & by confronting their hypocrisy & unbelief (23). Mark doesn't state the reason for their **offense** this time, but the implication is they refused to believe that one from such humble & familiar beginnings could be the Messiah. They're offended (& maybe jealous) that this *young upstart* is acting with greater authority than His family background & social status permit,<sup>10</sup> that He's too big for His britches.

The word **offense** was also used of a building stone that was rejected. When builders selected stones to be used in construction, they examined the quality & strength of them. The goal was to find the best materials & some stones had to be rejected. Jesus is seen as the rejected stone in Scripture. Ps 118:22 says, **The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone.** Jesus quoted this verse in reference to Himself in His debates with the Jewish religious leaders (Mt 21:42; Mk 12:10; Lk 20:17) & Peter quoted it before the Sanhedrin & in his 1<sup>st</sup> letter (Acts 4:11; 1 Pt 2:7). Remember, the prophets & the Apostles are called the foundation for the church (Eph

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<sup>8</sup> *The Age of Reason*, p 22

<sup>9</sup> James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar NT Commentary, p 173

<sup>10</sup> Strauss, p 243

2:20), but Jesus Himself is the cornerstone. Yet, He was **despised & forsaken of men** (Is 53:3). He was rejected by His own people, by His family, by His townsmen, by His neighbors, by the nation of Israel. The One whom God appointed to be the cornerstone of His building was considered flawed & repulsive by those closest to Him.

**2. Jesus' Response** (4-6) Jesus responded to their anger & resentment by quoting a similar...

**A. Proverb** that He had cited on His previous visit (Lk 4:24). **4**

**In his hometown** Jesus was rejected. His former neighbors found themselves asking, *Who does this guy think He is?* Admittedly, their curiosity was piqued when they heard about how popular He'd become. Yet they couldn't believe He had the audacity to return & confront them claiming to be the Messiah. The identification of Jesus as a **prophet** is unusual for Mark, occurring only here in his gospel. For Mark, Jesus is more than a prophet; He is the Messiah & Son of God (8:28–29; cf 6:14–15). Yet Jesus will suffer the same fate as of the prophets. Then we read, **5**.

**B. No Miracles (except a few)** What does this mean? This statement seemingly limiting Jesus' power is shocking, especially in the context of a gospel where Jesus' authority over storms, demons, disease, & death has been on display. Matthew phrases it differently, saying Jesus **did not do many miracles there** (Mt 13:58). Yet Mark's statement makes good sense in a context where Jesus has been performing miracles in response to faith (2:5; 4:40; 5:34, 36; 9:23–24; 10:52; 11:22–24). When faith is required for spiritual blessings, there can be no miracles without it. The unbelief in Nazareth stands in stark contrast to the previous miracles, where the faith of the sick woman (5:34) & of Jairus (5:36) resulted in healing & new life. It isn't that Jesus suddenly lost His power when He went to Nazareth, that He was incapable of the miracles He'd done elsewhere. Rather, the circumstances by which God the Holy Spirit unleashed that power weren't available there, because there was a judgment of God on the town of Nazareth. In other words, God mostly withheld His power from the stiff-necked people who held Jesus in contempt.<sup>11</sup> In response to the people's unbelief, Jesus chose not to do any miracles in Nazareth, with the exception of a few healings. Again, the issue wasn't that He lacked the power to perform miracles. But that there was no reason

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<sup>11</sup> Sproul, pp 119–120

to do miracles there, since the purpose of His miracles was to prove the truth & reveal Himself as the Messiah & lead sinners to saving faith. Because the people of Nazareth were already set in their rejection of Him, miracles were pointless. To remove false ideas that Jesus' ability to do miracles was dependent on the faith of people, He often healed people who didn't express any faith in Him. For example, in Lk 17, only one of the 10 lepers cured confessed faith in Him & was saved. The crippled man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:13) didn't even know Jesus' identity when he was healed. The man born blind (Jn 9:1, 7) didn't speak of his faith in Jesus until after he was given sight (38). When Jesus raised people from the dead, He obviously did so without 1<sup>st</sup> requiring faith from them (Lk 7:14; Jn 11:43). Jesus healed many people, even though not all of them believed (Mt 9:35; 11:2-5; 12:15-21; 14:13-14, 34-36; 15:29-31; 19:2). Clearly, Jesus' power wasn't at all hindered by unbelief. Nonetheless, the hard-hearted rejection of Nazareth was such that there was no reason to do many miracles there. On one hand, this was merciful. If He had done more miracles in Nazareth, their judgment for rejecting Him would have increased (Mt 11:2-24). But Jesus' withholding miracles was also a sign of judgment (Mt 7:6). The purpose of miracles was never to entertain the hard-hearted but to move those who were open to the gospel toward saving faith. His miracles were of no spiritual benefit for those who refused to believe, & He had no interest in indulging ungodly curiosity (Lk 23:8-9). Despite this, God's kingdom advances, & some are healed (6). Mark's qualification, **except that He laid His hands on a few sick people & healed them** (5), is ironic & even comical. In most any context the miraculous healing of **a few** would be newsworthy, hardly classified as *doing no miracle*. Yet in contrast to Jesus' remarkable ministry up to this point, it's considered a failure. Disbelief ties Jesus' hands, so to speak, so that His miracles & grace cease to operate. In a sense, unbelief hinders God's power. Let me be perfectly clear: Jesus **could do no miracle** because He chose not to do them. Omnipotence isn't omnipotence if it's bound by anything but its own will. Again, Matthew makes this clear saying Jesus **did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief** (Mt 13:58). Unbelief freezes the exercise of God's power. If we want to please God, to know His pleasure & power, we must believe that the God revealed in the Bible



exists & that He acts rightly always. Do you believe this? Do you live like you believe it? This scene closes with **6**.

**C. Wondered at Their Unbelief** Amazement has been a major theme throughout the Galilean ministry (1:22, 27; 2:12; 5:15, 20; 5:42; 6:51; cf 12:17), but always as a response to Jesus' words & works. Now it's Jesus who is amazed. Though people were constantly astonished by Jesus, the NT relates only 2x when He was amazed by people. Both involved faith. On the positive side, Jesus marveled at the strong faith expressed by a Roman centurion in Capernaum. According to Lk 7:9, **When Jesus heard this, He marveled at him, & turned & said to the crowd that was following Him, 'I say to you, not even in Israel have I found such great faith.'** Conversely, in His hometown of Nazareth, it was the utter absence of faith that caused Him to be amazed in that **He wondered at their unbelief.** Was He truly surprised? No. Mark's point isn't that Jesus is taken off guard, but that those who should be most responsive to Jesus are the most resistant to it. We should be as shocked as Jesus is by their lack of faith.<sup>12</sup> Jesus is surprised not that they didn't believe, but at the depth of their callousness. With unbelief comes hostility. Unbelief is always dangerous, destructive, & leads to trouble. There's nothing you need more desperately than Jesus. If you don't have Jesus, you have no hope in this life or in the life to come. Let me say it again. If you do not have Jesus, you have no hope. There's a great danger here. The people of Nazareth had the Lord of glory in their midst for some 3 decades & yet all they saw was the offense. In the end, He could do no mighty works among them, instead **He was going around the villages teaching** (6b). Being rejected in His hometown, He took His ministry elsewhere to the villages around Nazareth. Jesus left & began a teaching tour in other, more receptive towns in Galilee. For the inhabitants of His hometown, the outcome was tragic.

How terrifying to amaze God with one's unbelief. Jesus was jarred by the deep-rooted faithlessness He found in Nazareth. For all of His earthly life, He'd been the most unique & amazing person in their midst. They didn't know why Jesus was different but they couldn't have missed that He was different. How could those who claimed to know all about Him stubbornly refuse to accept the only

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<sup>12</sup> Strauss, p 244

reasonable explanation regarding Him, that He was the Son of God? Such is the power of unbelief (2 Cor 4:3–4). Once it became clear that Nazareth had rejected Jesus, He rejected them. Unbelief can affect a whole community. It can cut off God’s power for others. In Nazareth many continued in their afflictions because they continued in their unbelief. Unbelief is still alive & well today & is a powerful force with devastating results. In the garden of Eden, Satan tempted Eve to doubt God’s words & she & Adam ate from the forbidden tree (Gen 3:1–7; 1 Tim 2:14). The people of Noah’s day refused to believe his warning & were drowned in the flood (Mt 24:38–39; 2 Pt 2:5; 3:3–6). After the exodus from Egypt, the faithlessness of Aaron & the people resulted in 3,000 people dying (Ex 32:28, 35). The fearful doubt of the 10 spies caused that generation to die in the wilderness (Num 13:32; 14:20–23). Achan’s unbelief brought the death of his family (Josh 7:25). Even after settling in the Promised Land, the recurring unbelief of the Jews brought God’s repeated judgment (Judg 2:7–11). The Jewish religious elite in the NT exhibited that same unbelief in their response to Jesus. As Stephen told the Sanhedrin,

**You men who are stiff-necked & uncircumcised in heart & ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers & murderers you have now become; you who received the law as ordained by angels, & yet did not keep it (Acts 7:51–53).**

Like all unbelievers, their hard-heartedness resulted in them dying in their sins (Jn 8:24). Unbelief in the Son of God activates His wrath. In the words of Jn 3:18, **He who believes in Him (Jesus) is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.** The people of Nazareth had received more than enough revelation to believe in Jesus & be saved. Instead, in unbelief, they rejected their Messiah. Don’t let that happen to you. Remember vs 1? The disciples are with Jesus. They watched & learned some important things that day in Nazareth. They’d seen His amazing displays of power & knew what He was capable of. They were beginning to see who He truly was. But now they saw that there were situations in which **He would do no miracles**, times when unbelief sabotaged what He would’ve liked to do. To serve Him they must believe. They also learned that it wouldn’t be easy. If Jesus found it hard to do God’s work, how much more would they? With these lessons in place, Jesus

would send them out to the unbelieving world (7). Jesus would warn them they'd face similar circumstances. On the night before His death, He summarized that His followers should expect persecution, saying, **If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you...** He goes on & says, **If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you** (Jn 15:18, 20). This passage would've been important for Mark's original gentile readers in Rome, who were suffering rejection & persecution from their countrymen, perhaps from their own relatives & neighbors (13:12-13). To become a follower of Jesus means our citizenship is in heaven (Phil 3:20) & in this life we live as foreigners & exiles in an alien land (1 Pt 1:1, 17; 2:11). It means a willingness to give up all to follow Him (Mk 8:34-36; 10:29). For Mark's readers, the rejection of the Messiah & His messengers is a reminder that all who desire to live godly lives will suffer persecution (2 Tim 3:12). But in the end, suffering & persecution will give way to vindication & salvation. Jesus said, **For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake & the gospel's will save it** (Mk 8:35). It would be easy for us to look at this passage & say, *What terrible people they were!* Before you do that, take a closer look at yourself. What don't you believe that God has said? Is your unbelief different than theirs? For example, do you really believe that in Jesus you've been given everything you need for life & godliness (2 Pt 1:3)? Do you live like you believe it? Do you really believe that God will supply all your needs (Phil 4:18)? Do you live like you believe it? We could go on & on. What must we do with this passage? Maybe you have to honestly say, *I don't think I've ever put my faith in Jesus.* Then come to Jesus today, confessing your need & receive the grace that only He can give. Maybe you've put your faith in Jesus but realize you're battling unbelief in your heart. You recognize you don't always live like you believe that Jesus is God & that His promises are true. Because of the sacrificial death of Jesus you don't have to hide in guilt & shame & fear because your weaknesses, failures, & sins have been covered by His sacrificial death & resurrection for you. Today you can still run into His presence & say, *I believe, but help me in my unbelief.* See that the needle of the barometer declares Jesus as the Messiah, our only hope for forgiveness & life. Don't be cynical & hard-hearted like the people of Nazareth. Allow your faith to grow & be strengthened because Jesus is who He claimed to be. Do you believe?