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## THE NARROW MIND

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I remember still something that happened one day when I was in college. I was sitting at breakfast, chatting with a female friend who was engaged to be married. The young man she was going to marry was studying to be a CPA. He had plans and goals for their future; but he also had a hobby of playing computer games. This female friend of mine, the bride-to-be, said, “When we get married I won’t let him waste his time on those games.” The reason I remember that is that I share that hobby, and I remember being shocked by her statement. I thought to myself, “That’s a marriage that’s headed for trouble. She says she loves him just as she is, but she’s going to force him to change?”

I think that happens in a lot of marriages: we know about our spouse-to-be’s peculiarities ahead of time, and we think, “Well, that’s just not good enough for me!” and we set about to change the person. When that happens, both people are miserable. It is narrow-minded and hypocritical to say that we love someone enough to marry them and then try to force that person to change after the knot is tied.

Now, don’t you think churches sometimes do the same thing with the church family? The church welcomes someone to the church, and they start coming, and everything is good; but after a while people start to criticize and gossip: “Well, I just think her dresses are too short” or “Why can’t he get a haircut?” Very often this happens when the church hires a preacher. Everything is fine for six months to a year, but after that, that rascal can’t do anything right! He can’t preach right, he can’t sing right, he can’t visit right, he can’t teach right, he can’t lead right, and his wife’s no good, either! Oh, and let’s not forget that his kids aren’t perfect! We develop such a narrow view of exactly what a preacher or a church member ought to be that no one can live up to that standard; and even if that person changes and does exactly what you’ve been criticizing him about, you’ll change your mind and he’ll still be wrong! But isn’t it funny that we never hold ourselves to that same standard? We’re okay, and if we do mess up, people should just accept us for who we are.

It’s a funny thing to be a human. You know how we are: we expect people to love us and accept us just as we are and to forgive us when we make a mistake; but on the other hand, we want to change the people we say that we love and make them conform to our standard, and we tend to hold grudges against the people who hurt us.

Let me tell you something: some people are so narrow-minded that even if Jesus Himself were to enter a church—any church!—in human form, after a while some people would even criticize Him and gossip about Him! I say that based on the passage we’re going to read today. Look with me at Mark 6:1–6:

<sup>1</sup> *And he went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him.*

<sup>2</sup> *And when the sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?*

<sup>3</sup> *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

<sup>4</sup> *But Jesus, said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, but in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house.*

<sup>5</sup> *And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them.*

<sup>6</sup> *And he marvelled because of their unbelief. And he went round about the villages, teaching.*

Do you notice this? Jesus came into His own country, that is, the place where He grew up. Everyone around knew His family. They knew where He had lived, what kind of child He had been, what sort of work His earthly father had done. They knew who the family friends were. In some ways, that kind of reminds me of the town of Waverly Hall, where everyone who lived here fifty years ago knew everyone else, and where we still refer to houses by the family's name that owned the house decades ago.

These folks in Nazareth thought they knew everything important about Him. Nothing could be said about Jesus that they didn't already know. They were dreadfully, terribly wrong about that! What this really shows is how narrow-minded *they themselves* were.

My *alma mater*, Pensacola Christian College, selects a number of students each year to travel around the country in singing groups representing the college and recruiting students for it. The college is also affiliated with a kindergarten through grade twelve Christian academy, and frequently students who graduate from the academy apply to the college. Some of those students try out for these singing ensembles; but, in the past, the faculty almost always passed over them in favor of other students from around the country. One day, one of these faculty members paused to reflect on this practice. He said, "Why do we pass over the kids from our own academy?" He realized that they knew too much about these kids: they knew how they had behaved in high school and how they had made mistakes. Then he realized that the kids that were coming in from other parts of the country most likely had their own issues in high school that the college faculty simply could not have known. Once they realized what they had been doing subconsciously, they made a conscious effort from that point on to judge the applicants by talent alone. They determined to give everyone a fair chance.

We're often guilty of the same thing: we think we know all about somebody. We think we've got other people all figured out. Listen to me, folks! Whenever we say, "They're just doing that *because...*" we are judging other people's hearts and assigning motives there. Only God can do that!

I want you to notice that the people of Nazareth asked some valid questions, but they gave the wrong answers to their questions. Look back at verse 2, about halfway through: "*From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands?*" Those are valid, legitimate questions, and if they had been open-minded, those questions would have led them to the right answers. But they are not open-minded.

Instead of seeking honest answers to their own questions, they supplied the answers from what they "knew" to be true. You see, they believed they knew all there was to know about Jesus. They would not, could not, accept anything more than what they already knew. Did you see verse 13?

<sup>3</sup> *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him.*

They limited their view of Jesus to something much, much less than He really was. They said, “He can’t possibly be that wise! He can’t possibly be that good of a teacher! After all, *we* know everything we need to know already, and there’s nothing *he* can teach us. Just who does He think He is, pretending to be someone special? We know all there is to know about Him, and if He were going to be someone great, we would have known about it a long time ago. But we remember Him as an ordinary boy from an ordinary family, and He’s got *no business* acting like He can teach us something in our synagogue!”

Listen to these words from Pastor Ray Stedman:

We can gather up the meaning of this whole account in just a few words: limited views mean limited lives. That is, if your view of life is so narrow and crabbed, so withered and shrunken as to include nothing but what you can see and feel and taste and smell and hear and reason, then your life is going to be horribly deprived and poverty-stricken. This is how it was in Nazareth.<sup>1</sup>

You know what? If Jesus had been the preacher in that synagogue, they would have run Him right out of town. “I’ve been here seventy years, and I’ve never seen it done that way before!” They were *offended*—offended by Jesus!

Now, listen to me closely at this point, please! You will never find a perfect church member. You will never find a perfect deacon. You will never find a perfect Sunday school teacher. You will never find a perfect pastor. If you ever were to find such a one, you’d probably run him right out of town, just like these people did to the only perfect preacher this world has ever seen.

It’s easy for us to look at this story and see that the blame lies squarely on the narrow-minded people of Nazareth. But if you were to ask them, I’m sure they had perfectly good sounding reasons to be offended. I’m sure that they had everything settled in their own minds. And friends, we are no different today, two thousand years later and halfway around the world. We still like to think we have all the answers. We still like to believe that we know all we need to know about people. We still like to think we have the right to be offended, to be aggressive, to be mean-spirited against the people who don’t measure up to our standards. Oh, but we do not like to be judged!

In the end, Jesus ministry was stifled there in His hometown. He was able to do a few little good deeds for those who dared to ask Jesus for help; but most of the people would have nothing to do with Him; and woe to any of the neighbors who dared to go to Jesus for help! They would be criticized, ostracized and talked down, probably for the rest of their lives.

And what is the result? Everyone knows that Jesus came from Nazareth, but Nazareth never prospered. Nazareth remained a conclave of poor people with poor mindsets and narrow-minded standards. Nazareth was not a place for dreamers, for the hopeful, for the ingenious; it was a place where cold water was poured on every aspiration. Nazareth never amounted to much because of the small-mindedness of its people.

Now friends, we do not want a church like that, do we? Do we want a church where people are afraid to use their gifts because they’ll just be criticized and talked about badly? Do we want a church where people are afraid to build up a ministry because they know someone else will come along and knock it all down? Do we want a church where people only feel welcome if they come here already meeting

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<sup>1</sup> Ray Stedman, “The Weakness of the World.” 12 January 1975. Available at <http://www.raystedman.org/new-testament/mark/the-weakness-of-the-world>.

certain unspoken standards of clothing and behavior? I surely hope not, because a church like that is doomed. A church will remain as small and narrow as its mindset.

Now this sermon was not a sermon about salvation; yet there is a message here as well. If your view of Jesus is that He is a good teacher, your view of Him is too small. If you think He's got some good things to say, but is not the Savior of the world, then your view of Him is too small. I assure you this morning that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, who died for your sins and mine, and rose again on the third day. I urge you not to reject His message of love to you today.