

# Are We Becoming Nazareth?

*On familiarity, shrunken expectations, and how we find our awe again.*

## Mark 6:5–6 (ESV)

*And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. And he marvelled because of their unbelief.*

## The Day Jesus Went Home

Jesus goes back to Nazareth — the streets He grew up running, the neighbours who watched Him learn to walk, the synagogue where He first learned the Torah. He gets up to teach, and the crowd is amazed — genuinely, initially, amazed — and then something shifts.

You can almost feel it in the room. *We know him.* Not in a reverent way. In the most deflating, ordinary, shrinking way possible. *We know where he's from. We know his mum. We watched him sand wood.*

## Mark 6:3 (ESV)

*"Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him.*

And there it is. *We know him.* Jesus — who healed the blind, calmed storms, raised the dead — stood in his own hometown and was genuinely astonished at what wasn't happening. Not because his power had diminished. But because there was nowhere for it to land.

*"Familiarity didn't kill the miracles. Familiarity quietly led them to decide who Jesus was — and once they'd decided, they'd stopped looking."*

## The Box We Build Without Knowing It

The people of Nazareth weren't hostile at first. They were, in their own way, religious people who knew the scriptures. But something clicked over — some internal categorisation happened — and Jesus got filed away

under *known*.

We learn the stories. We memorise the theology. We can name the books of the Bible and recite the miracles. And somewhere in the knowing, we build a box — not intentionally, not maliciously — a box of what God *does* and doesn't do. What to expect and what to quietly stop expecting.

**Psalm 78:41**

*They limited the Holy One of Israel. — The Hebrew word carries the idea of putting up a boundary, a fence. Not through outright rejection, but by reducing God to what they already understood of Him.*

Compare the people of Nazareth to the woman in Mark 5 — twelve years of bleeding, no theology degree, just desperate faith and one thought: *If I can just touch the hem of his garment*. She didn't box Jesus into what He probably would or wouldn't do. She simply believed He *could*.

Or the Centurion — a Roman soldier, no religious pedigree — who says simply: *Just say the word*. And Jesus turns to the crowd and says:

**Matthew 8:10 (NIV)**

*"Truly, I tell you, with no one in Israel have I found such faith."*

*"The people of Nazareth weren't wrong about who Jesus was. They were just incomplete. And incomplete turned out to be enough to miss the miracle."*

## Knowledge Without Awe

There's a particular danger that comes with spiritual maturity. Knowledge can slowly replace wonder if we're not paying attention. Think about the first time you really understood grace — not just as a doctrine but as a living reality. The first time you felt the weight of being fully known and fully loved anyway.

C.S. Lewis wrote that we are far too easily pleased — that we settle for mud pies in the slums when we have been offered a holiday at the sea. Familiarity can do this to our faith. We settle for the comfortable version of God — the one who fits our categories — rather than the God who is wildly, uncomfortably, magnificently *more* than our understanding of Him.

**Job 42:5 (ESV)**

*"I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you."*

Heard of you. Versus *sees* you. There is a whole world in that difference. Moses, who had seen more of God's power than almost anyone, still asked in Exodus 33: *Show me your glory*. Not — I've seen enough. But — *more*. *Show me more*. Intimacy deepened his hunger, not reduced it.

## Five Ways to Widen the Box

### Practical steps for recapturing awe:

1. Read scripture like you've never read it before. Pick a passage you think you know, sit with it, and ask God: "What am I missing here?" Not what does this confirm — but what am I not seeing yet?
2. Pray bold prayers again. Not just maintenance prayers. Wrestle-with-God prayers. Embarrassingly large prayers. The kind Jacob prayed when he said, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."
3. Practise holy interruption. Before you explain away the unexpected — the coincidence, the unlikely answer, the strange peace — pause. Let God be God before your theology kicks in.
4. Restore reverence alongside intimacy. God is Abba, Father — yes. He is also the One before whom Isaiah fell on his face. The nearness and the holiness of God belong together.
5. Become a child again. Jesus said it plainly: unless we become like little children, we cannot enter the kingdom. Children ask obvious questions. Children expect things adults have decided are impossible.

## Back to That Little Church

Part of what happens in the small, under-resourced church is desperation. When you don't have the excellent programs and the polished production, you tend to need God to show up in a way that comfortable churches sometimes forget to need. Desperation is a posture of openness. It's hard to put God in a box when you're genuinely desperate.

The early church in Acts — house churches, persecuted, poorly resourced — didn't form a committee when they were in trouble. They gathered and prayed, and the building shook (Acts 4:31). They *expected* God to do something. And He did.

*"We don't need a new God. We need a fresh revelation of the same God — the one who was always bigger than our categories."*

### Hebrews 13:8 (NIV)

*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

He hasn't changed. He hasn't become ordinary. He hasn't become manageable. He is the Son of God, alive, active, and still — *still* — capable of walking into your most impossible situation and doing something you didn't see coming.

The question is just whether we've quietly become Nazareth. Whether we've explained Him away. Filed Him under *known*. And if we have — the good news is, He already knows. He's not offended. He's just waiting for

us to look up and see Him again.

### **Reflect & Respond**

*Where have you quietly stopped expecting God to move — in your health, your relationships, your circumstances? What have you explained away as 'His will' that might actually be an invitation to ask?*

*When did you last feel genuine awe in God's presence — not just comfort, but the kind that makes you feel small in the best possible way? What was different then?*

*What would you ask for if you genuinely believed He could do anything? Write it down. Pray it. Don't explain it away first.*

### **A Prayer**

*Dear Father,*

*Help me see you — like Job saw you, like Moses saw you. Let me see your magnitude, your awesomeness. Open my eyes to see you, not just know you through what I read, think or feel.*

*Help me to not take you for granted and to always walk in the shadow of your sheer magnitude. Open my heart and eyes to see you work in my life and in the life of others, of our brothers and sisters, of our church, community and home.*

*I thank you that you are God, Lord of Lords, King of Kings — yet still close. Thank you that you are the same today as you were at the beginning of creation and will always be the same. Thank you for You.*

*In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

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