

## Where is God? 1-16-05

Matthew 13:53-58 (NIV)

*<sup>53</sup> When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there.<sup>54</sup> Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked.<sup>55</sup> "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?<sup>56</sup> Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"<sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."<sup>58</sup> And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

This story, like all Bible stories, has some history behind it. Jesus had grown up in Nazareth. Nazareth was a town of descendants of David who were looking forward to the promises to David to be fulfilled through them. It had been prophesied that a king would be born in David's line that would rule forever. (Psalm 89:35-37) He is called the branch of David in prophecies, (Jeremiah 23:5) and so the town was named Branch (Netzor-Nazareth). Jesus had an uneventful childhood, though He certainly must have been a peculiar child. I believe that after Joseph died, sometime in Jesus' teenage years, Jesus became the breadwinner in His home as a carpenter.

Jewish tradition had men learn as disciples until the age of 30 when they were ready to be masters of their trade or teaching. It was around this age that Jesus was asked to speak in the Synagogue of Nazareth. (Luke 3:23; Luke 4:14-30) The people were in awe of what He was saying as He read from Isaiah 61 and stated that the prophecies were fulfilled in Him. If He had only stopped there! He went on to tell them that they were going to reject Him but that God's message would be received by Gentiles. In a rage, they took Him to a cliff to push Him off. He miraculously escaped and moved to Capernaum.

In our passage today, He returned for a visit to Nazareth. Would you return to a city that tried to kill you for speaking the truth? Jesus is full of grace. (John 1:14) Perhaps He was hoping that some of His former neighbors had heard of His miraculous works and would receive the gospel. Their response was better than the first ministry He did there, but still not very favorable, just as He had predicted. These trials of rejection could have made Jesus bitter towards them. Even His family seemed to abandon Him for a time. You have probably heard the old saying that difficulty makes you bitter or better. Jesus refused to let it make Him bitter. Nor did He become angry with God for the world being unfair.

The devastation caused by the recent tsunami has raised many questions about the goodness and sovereignty of God. Where was God in all that destruction? How could He allow a church filled with worshippers to be wiped out? What kind of God would let one stroke of nature take over 150,000 lives? For most people, these are very sincere questions, and they are questions that relate to the pain and suffering in their own life.

Jesus could have asked how those He was kind and patient with for 30 years would reject His example and the fulfillment of the very prophecies they had been waiting

**Commented [notes1]:** <sup>35</sup> Once for all, I have sworn by my holiness-- and I will not lie to David <sup>36</sup> that his line will continue forever and his throne endure before me like the sun; <sup>37</sup> it will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky." Selah  
Psalms 89:35-37 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** <sup>5</sup> "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.  
Jeremiah 23:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** <sup>23</sup> And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,  
Luke 3:23 (KJV)

**Commented [notes4]:** <sup>14</sup> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. <sup>15</sup> He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. <sup>16</sup> He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. <sup>17</sup> The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: <sup>18</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." <sup>20</sup> Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, <sup>21</sup> and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." <sup>22</sup> All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: 'Physician, heal yourself! Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.'" <sup>24</sup> "I tell you the truth," he continued, "no prophet is accepted in his hometown. <sup>25</sup> I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. <sup>26</sup> Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. <sup>27</sup> And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed--only Naaman the Syrian." <sup>28</sup> All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. <sup>29</sup> They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. <sup>30</sup> But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.  
Luke 4:14-30 (NIV)

**Commented [notes5]:** <sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.  
John 1:14 (NIV)

for. I do not think He did, because He understood the fall. He did not have unrealistic expectations. He knew what was in the heart of men. (John 2:24-25) He did have an advantage over us in that He could see why a man was born blind (John 9:2-3), or why a tower collapsed on people (Luke 13:4-5), and rebuked others for their wrong conclusions. But the understanding of the fall should temper our expectations as it certainly did in Jesus.

The fall of man in Genesis 3 tells us that man is inherently evil. We are born with Adam's nature. (Psalm 51:5) I come from a long line of rebels against God, going all the way back to Adam. Most Christians understand that theology, but when their Christian friend cheats them, they cannot believe such a thing could happen. When it comes down to personal conflict, especially that within the church or our family, we suddenly think the fall should not have any affect. We realize that we are not perfect and expect others to realize that, but we somehow let that expectation creep into our life. We allow an unbiblical expectancy to become our demand on others when we would never expect it of ourselves. That just goes to show you how fallen we are.

Jesus may have hoped for more receptivity in Nazareth, and He did to some extent, but He already knew His prediction of their refusal to accept Him would come to pass. More than anyone who ever lived, Jesus understands man's condition. He also understood the fallen condition of the world. When man fell, the earth came under a curse. (Romans 8:20-21) Earthquakes and tornadoes are not God's original intention for this planet. Whose fault is it then? The rebellion of man against God brought it on. There is a connection between the sins of man and the condition of the planet that we read about in God's dealing with Israel. (2 Chronicles 7:14) When they were obedient, natural cycles of rain and harvest took place. When the sinned and innocent people were murdered, the natural cycles were broken and the land would not produce. (Jeremiah 23:10)

Not only has the rebellion of man caused the earth to be cursed, but also it has allowed the Prince of the world to wreak havoc. When Jesus was in the boat during the storm, He rebuked the wind and waves. (Mark 4:39) If He rebuked it, it was certainly not something from God or simply natural. There was a force behind it. Jesus declared that the one who was out to steal, destroy, and kill was Satan. God had sent Jesus to give life, not to take it. (John 10:10)

The answer to the question of cause is simple but at the same time complex. I can unequivocally say that it is a result of the fall of man, his rebellion in the Garden and subsequent rebellion throughout history. At the same time, I can say that Satan is out to kill and destroy. Yet, God uses these events for judgment and to call His own home at their appointed time. At the same time, I can say all things work together for good to those who love God and that He is sovereign over all. (Romans 8:28)

I do not pretend to understand why that church was destroyed while people were worshipping inside, but I do not struggle with it. That is because I know the heart of God. It was plainly displayed on the cross. (Romans 8:32) I can imagine scenarios that might help a skeptic, but I do not know for sure if that is the case. What if they hadn't been in church? What if some of the family was at work on the sea and they

**Commented [notes6]:** <sup>24</sup> But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all men. <sup>25</sup> He did not need man's testimony about man, for he knew what was in a man.  
John 2:24-25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** <sup>2</sup> His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" <sup>3</sup> "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."  
John 9:2-3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes8]:** <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them--do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish."  
Luke 13:4-5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes9]:** <sup>5</sup> Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes11]:** <sup>14</sup> If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.  
2 Chronicles 7:14 (KJV)

**Commented [notes12]:** <sup>10</sup> The land is full of adulterers; because of the curse the land lies parched and the pastures in the desert are withered. The [prophets] follow an evil course and use their power unjustly.  
Jeremiah 23:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes13]:** <sup>39</sup> And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.  
Mark 4:39 (KJV)

**Commented [notes14]:** <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.  
John 10:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes15]:** <sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.  
Romans 8:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes16]:** <sup>32</sup> He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all--how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?  
Romans 8:32 (NIV)

lost loved ones and had to endure the pain of that loss. Wouldn't they want to enter heaven together? We so readily ignore the many people who were saved because they were in churches on higher ground. I do not hear any reporters praising God for letting it happen at a time when many were away from the water worshipping. My friend's first comment was that every nation affected was a nation where Christianity is under attack. His question was asking if God was dealing with these nations because of their opposition to the gospel? Indonesia has seen thousands of Christian martyrs in the last decade. The answer is not that simple.

Where is God in times of devastation? The psalmist said He is close to the brokenhearted. (Psalm 34:18) He is weeping with those that weep. He is in the heart of many of the rescue workers and donors that provide relief. He is receiving those who died in faith and presenting to them their eternal reward. He said through Ezekiel that He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. (Ezekiel 18:23) He is drawing people to Himself in the midst of their suffering. I know that because His word declares it is so.

There are a few other alternatives of belief even worth considering. You can believe that we are here by accident on a planet in which we will one day be extinct, and that there is no God. In that case, strength and brutality reign. Or you could be agnostic and think that God does not care. Then why should you or I? Or you can believe that God is merely angry with man and tragedy is His hand of wrath. That was the Pharisee viewpoint. It would lead us to live a life of fear. I will take the God of the Bible.

We usually call suffering evil, it often is the result of evil, and yet, God can transform lives through it. Over 100 people have accepted Christ at Verde Baptist since the Hutchinson's were killed. Is that the reason God allowed their death at this time? The free will of man, the sovereignty of God, the potential future, a fallen world, a cosmic battle for souls, and countless other factors are involved. I am glad God is God and I am not. I am especially thankful that I can count on Him doing what is best for those who love Him. Look at the cross. Look at your own life. Times of suffering and anguish are often the times we are closest to God. David declared that it was through his suffering that he learned about God. (Psalm 119:71) God does not desire for man to suffer, and yet, when living in a fallen world brings it about, whether through man or nature, God is there to make it worth something of eternal value in our lives. The Bible gives the only answers that match this world we observe. Fallen man is living in a fallen world in which good and evil are at war.

I am amazed that Jesus went back to Nazareth because I know my own heart. I would not want to give them a second chance. His return shows us the heart of God. How many second chances has He given you? How then should you respond to those who reject you? How many second chances should you give them?

*<sup>54</sup> Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?"* Those who had tried to kill Him could not help but recognize the wisdom and miracle working power in Jesus. His life up to 30 was a testimony, but when it was time for Him to minister in the power of the Spirit, then they could see something different. It

**Commented [notes17]:** <sup>18</sup> The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.  
Psalms 34:18 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** <sup>23</sup> Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?  
Ezekiel 18:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** <sup>71</sup> It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees.  
Psalms 119:71 (NIV)

is the same with us. When God sends us to those who have known us, and we go in the power of the Spirit, they will see something different, the life of Christ, and they too will be amazed.

*<sup>55</sup> "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?" <sup>56a</sup> Aren't all his sisters with us?"*

The town of Nazareth was quite small in Jesus' day. Many estimates put it at about 300. Everyone in the city would know the whole family. To maintain the idea of Mary's perpetual virginity, the Catholic Church believes that the brothers and sisters mentioned were from a previous marriage of Joseph. They suggest that after his wife died, Joseph married Mary knowing she was under a vow of chastity. They equate perpetual virginity with holiness when Scripture does no such thing. (Hebrews 13:4) Protestants believe that these brothers and sisters are all children of Mary. To those of us who do not see the need to maintain Mary was a virgin until death, it makes little difference. In [Mark 1:25](#) there seems to be an indication that she was a virgin only until the birth of Jesus.

The real point in the passage is that the people of Nazareth were saying that Jesus is just one of us. Their pride would not allow them to admit that God had brought the Messiah from a family other than their own. For Jesus' own family, the brothers may have been upset that it was their perfect older brother and not they who were chosen. "Mother always did love him best!"

If God begins to bring revival to Sedona through Solid Rock Church, or the Church of Christ, is it going to be all right with you? Does He have to bring it through Wayside Chapel? I hope we will not be as insistent that God work through us and ours as the people of Nazareth were. As long as He is saving people, we should be joyful.

*<sup>56b</sup> Where then did this man get all these things?" <sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown and in his own house is a prophet without honor."* He did not go to Dallas Theological Seminary! He does not even have a Masters in Theology. Who does He think He is telling us what the Law really means? Did He study under a great rabbi? Man is always looking to man for authority. Jesus' authority was from God. His teaching came from being in the presence of God in prayer. ([John 7:16](#)) They were offended because He came with the authority that was God given instead of man given. We have seen before how that word "offended" means to stumble or the trigger of a trap. They had tripped over His personality, methodology, and humanity. They were offended "at Him", the passage says. Maybe they expected a different style. Maybe He was not respected enough by the rabbi as they thought He should be. They had focused on petty, unsubstantial reasons to reject Him and not on the wisdom He was sharing.

Do not fall into the same trap! As we are fallen creatures, we tend to look on the outward appearance instead of the heart. ([1 Samuel 16:7](#)) We look at the physical and get upset with one thing or another. If we could just focus on what is substantial. The reason a prophet has no honor in his own home and town is because the people are so familiar with the natural person. They miss the anointing because they cannot see past the flesh. Familiarity breeds contempt because we see ourselves and our

**Commented [notes20]:** <sup>4</sup> Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral. Hebrews 13:4 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** <sup>25</sup> But he had no union with her until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus. Matthew 1:25 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** <sup>16</sup> Jesus answered, "My teaching is not my own. It comes from him who sent me. John 7:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7 (NIV)

own weaknesses in the person. That was not true in Jesus' case, but it is with the rest of us. With Jesus, they just saw the carpenter and could not get past the familiarity. There is a good saying that goes, "An expert is anyone from over 100 miles away with a briefcase." As long as we are not familiar with them, we have not noticed things we personally do not like about them, yet.

The opposite should be true. If someone from our own community, in whom we have seen our own weaknesses is anointed of God, we should marvel that God would use one of us. We should submit to the anointing and authority given by God. (Hebrews 13:17) We do not follow our elders because they are perfect, even though they are to be above reproach. (1 Timothy 3:2) We follow anointed authority because God has set them over us. Elders are as fallible as anyone else is, but we submit because God has placed them over us.

*<sup>58</sup> And he did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith.*

There is a parallel passage to this in Mark 6. That section concludes in verse 6, *And he was amazed at their lack of faith.* This passage for today begins with their amazement at His wisdom and ends with His amazement at their lack of faith. Lack of faith limits the flow of the power of God. Do you come to worship with the faith of expectancy that God will meet you here and speak to your heart? Or do you limit what God can do in a worship service and in your life by a lack of faith? Are you looking to me to make things happen or Almighty God? In '05 I pray for an increase of expectation and faith so that we do not limit what God can do in and through us.

I suppose that Jesus was amazed that those who had seen Him just as a simple carpenter could not see that the anointing on His ministry was so powerful. He was amazed they grew up with Him but could not see the anointing. Often the contrast makes something stand out. A little thorn bush ablaze with the glory of God makes you stop and wonder as it did with Moses. It was that the boy's lunch was so small and yet fed a multitude that was awe-inspiring. It was that Peter was such a failure that his success pointed to God's ability. It is when God uses someone like you and me that we should wonder and believe. It is when we see a church like Wayside Chapel that was full of turmoil and strife come alive with the power of the Holy Spirit that we should believe that God can do anything. But when we see those things and yet do not have more faith, it is because we have too great a view of our part in it and too little belief in the greatness and ability of God. (Zechariah 4:6)

Do not amaze God with your lack of faith. Amaze Him with your expectancy of what He can do! Amaze Him with your belief that He can take your mustard seed of faith and turn it into a great tree. Amaze Him with your faith that knows He can take you as a little batch of yeast and infect the whole dough of this city. Ask and expect a miracle, God working through you! If you believe and have faith, He not only can work through you, He will work through you. (Matthew 19:26) He is the God of second chances. He can do more through you and through this church than we could even imagine if we will look to Him and believe in His ability to use even us!

**Commented [notes24]:** <sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.  
Hebrews 13:17 (NIV)

**Commented [notes25]:** <sup>2</sup> Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach,  
1 Timothy 3:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** <sup>6</sup> So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.  
Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** <sup>26</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."  
Matthew 19:26 (NIV)