

JJ¹

Does God's beautiful creation still amaze you? Can you look at these beautiful clear skies we've had lately and thank God for the warm sun? Or do you see it as just something that's going to make your work or outdoor projects hotter? Can you walk out of your home and be amazed by the beautiful green grass in your lawn and it's simple complexity in how all those millions of blades do so much? Or, do you grumble because you know you'll just have to cut it again? Can you stop and be amazed as God paints another beautiful sunset? Or, is the setting sun just another sign that you didn't accomplish everything you wanted to that day and you'll just have to get up and do it all again tomorrow?

I think one of the best things you can do if you're becoming a crank and a cynic with God's amazing creation is to spend a little time with a young child and observe them discovering God's beautiful creation for the first time. It will amaze you all over again in what God has made and given to you.

The most precious and amazing thing found in God's creation is the Creator himself—Jesus Christ our Savior. Nothing more amazing happened in the history of the world than when the Creator himself became a part of his creation when God the Son took on our

human flesh. And there already is a problem from a human point of view. The Lord Almighty, King of Creation, The Most High and Holy God, came not in the splendor of heaven, but came in our human flesh. He looked like, needed like, ate like, slept like, cried like, dressed like, got sick like every other person. Just like you and me.

And this was a problem for the people of Nazareth. A few weeks ago we heard what happened the first time Jesus came into the region of Nazareth. It was then his family thought he lost his mind and wanted to take control of him (Mk. 3:31ff.). Now he's come home, and the reception starts well, but doesn't end well.

When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue. Many who heard him were amazed. They asked, "Where did this man learn these things? What is this wisdom that has been given to this man? How is it that miracles such as these are performed by his hands? Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

Aren't you amazed when you hear their reaction? Usually when a son or daughter of a town does well, the town is proud. It's something I find rather

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

interesting if you go to a town's webpage or wikipedia page. They'll often note all the significant people their town produced. If they really did something, they might even have a school, ball field, or even whole day named in their honor.

Yet for Jesus, the people who should have known him best of all, didn't know him at all. The word Mark uses to describe the people's amazement literally means they were knocked out of their senses. We might say they were flabbergasted.

He was that kind and polite boy who like any faithful firstborn son learned the trade of his father. Their houses were probably filled with various items he had made. Sure, he was a good student in the synagogue, listening carefully to the Rabbi, but then at 30 he just up and leaves and now he comes back a Rabbi himself!? He didn't go to the rabbinical school, so where did all of this wisdom come from? He made furniture with his hands and now he's commanding sickness and evil spirits to leave people's bodies?

"Where did this man learn these things?" You can just hear their disgust and unbelief in their words—"this man?" Luke tells us that they even tried to throw him off a cliff (Lk. 4:29)!

Those in Nazareth cannot list one sin he ever committed. They can accuse him of nothing. They have heard his wisdom and perhaps even seen his mighty works in other places. But in spite of all this evidence, they are being ensnared by their own sinful un-reason. Notice that their focus is not at all on the message, but only on externals. They use their familiarity with Jesus as their excuse to dismiss his message and repent!



What's also amazing is that because of the people's unbelief, Jesus was hardly able to do any miracles. There were just a few who quietly held on to faith in Jesus and still came to him later in the day when the crowd had gone home. And here in Israel, Jesus himself is amazed by their unbelief. What a terrible judgement! God himself is amazed by unbelief!!!

Could it be that Jesus is amazed at this congregation? Could it be that Jesus is amazed at you?

How have you acted like the people of Nazareth toward your fellow believers? How about toward Jesus and his messengers?

Maybe it's when someone who you know once fell into or even struggled with the same sin you're in. Maybe they

came to you to show you your sin. But you argued with them, "Hey, you did it! Lay off, would ya and keep your nose out of my business!" Have you ever considered that maybe, just maybe, they've matured in their life and faith to have something to offer to you? To react in that way is just as foolish and sinful as the teenager who doesn't want to listen to their parents when they warn them of the dangers and temptations of life so that their child wouldn't have to learn lessons the hard way. Could Jesus be amazed at you for rejecting the messengers he has sent into your life? You know.

Could Jesus be amazed at you for your reason to be in worship today? Why did you even come here today for worship? Is it because you're amazed by Jesus and his love for you and can't get enough of it, or is it just something you know you're supposed to do? Did you come here today to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to his Word which is the only thing that gives real life, or because this is where you're comfortable—or because it's close—or because you happen to like the music—or because the size of this congregation is just right—or because this is just where your family always went—or because right now you happen to like your pastor?

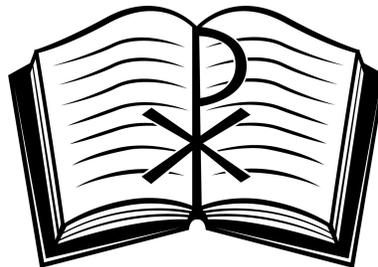
Could Jesus be amazed at you because you think you know God's grace so well

that you can go right on with your favorite, private sin and not worry about it at all? Notice again who it is that doesn't recognize Jesus! It's those who grew up with Jesus who should have known him the best of all who don't know him at all!!!

Most of you have grown up with Jesus in your life. And those of you who didn't, most of you have been here long enough to fall into this same trap. Are you losing your sense of amazement at the gospel? You are if you think you know the gospel well enough! You are if the last time you

cracked open your own Bible was your last confirmation class, be it 2 months or 20 years ago. You are if you make *any* part of the foundation of your forgiveness and hope of heaven based on what you do. What is Christmas to you? What is

Easter? Are they just dates on a calendar? Are they just days better spent at home? Even pagans know they should go to church on those days, and yet this house of worship has never packed to the gills with her own membership! And even if you were here, did you live your amazement at the gospel by persistently encouraging those who weren't planning on coming? What is your Baptism to you? What is the Lord's Supper? If they're just something you need to make sure you do as some sort of checklist for life, then Jesus is amazed at you! Just as much as he is amazed at me for all the



times I have turned all of this into just a professional duty to perform.

Go back to Nazareth. Aren't you amazed that Jesus didn't just leave in a huff? Notice that he still stays so that those who do still believe in him could come and be healed! Be amazed by Jesus' own patience with you. But please don't take it for granted. Be amazed that Jesus still lingers and waits for you. How slow you are to believe and how slow in anger he is with you. How cold you can be to his warm love, and yet his love never grows cold for you and he proved it by letting his heart grow cold in the death he died for you!

Be amazed, friends, at God's love for you that chose to have you live in this country that is more abundantly blessed than any nation on the face of the earth! Be amazed that he chose the family and/or friends for you that he did so that you would be connected to his truth found in his holy Word. Be amazed that in Baptism—something that seems so simple, and other Christians in this world want to pervert into an act of obedience—Jesus made his wedding vows to you, promising to always forgive, always love, always be near, and to bring you safely to your eternal home with him. Promises that cannot be broken. Be amazed that in the Lord's Supper—something that again appears ordinary and plain, and that

again other Christians in this world want to pervert into an act of obedience—Jesus gives you the very thing he used to pay for your forgiveness and freedom, his very body and blood! Be amazed that with our failings in this place, and our culture that is heading headlong into destruction, God still preserves his Word among us and gives us the gifts and freedoms we need to reach out into our community and even around the world with his precious gospel!

Friends, like a little child can help us stay amazed at God's beautiful creation, may each one of you continue to retain your child-like faith that is daily amazed by Jesus and his love for you. Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.

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