

The Danger of a Domesticated Jesus

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[0 : 00] Let me start, let me set up the passage with a very overused line, so you've heard it before, but I want to give us a different way of thinking of this. This is from Lewis's Narnia series, a very famous line where Susan, it's the line in which the wardrobe, they're just getting to know this idea of Aslan.

And if you'll remember, they hear that Aslan is a lion. And little Susan is nervous about meeting a lion.

She says, I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion. Is he safe? And of course, the famous line, safe, who said anything about safe?

Of course he isn't safe, but he's good. Now we've heard that line before. We love that line if you're a follower of Jesus that resonates with you.

That our Jesus, of course he isn't safe, but he's good. He's a lion. But this is coming from someone who had never heard of Aslan, the Christ figure in Narnia, who had never heard of the lion, who had never met the lion.

[1 : 08] And so the thought of meeting a lion, of course, is terrifying. Of course she understands it's not safe to meet a lion. Well, what if you've met the lion?

What if you have known the lion your whole life? What if you inhabit a culture that was literally created around this lion?

What if you had architecture and buildings and museums and history everywhere you look that speaks of this lion? What happens? You get pretty bored with the lion.

You forget that he isn't safe. So to us who are so familiar, I say us, I mean that. Yes, you have much more tradition. And our church, you are our fathers and mothers in the faith, or even grandfathers and grandmothers in the faith.

We see our tradition here. This is where our church began in some ways. But even in the States there is this danger of an over familiarity with Jesus.

[2 : 11] And the way I tell our people is we confess that he's a lion. We believe that he's a lion, but he's that whole he isn't safe has been lost. You know what he's like? He's kind of like the zoo lion.

He's the caged lion. When I went to seminary in St. Louis, Covenant Seminary, St. Louis is a larger city in the United States. And one of the cool things about this city that makes it unique is that all of it has so much entertainment and it's all free.

So they had this spectacular zoo, but it's free to the public. And so when the zoo is free, it becomes a wonderful source of entertainment for broke seminary students like myself back in the day.

So if it was a nice day like it was yesterday here and we needed a break from studying, we'd go over to the zoo and walk around for a bit. But I noticed something interesting started happening.

The zoo started to get a little boring.

Usually the zoo is a pretty expensive outing like it is here in Edinburgh. So if you're going to go to the zoo, it's a special event. It costs you money and whatnot. It's a big deal to go to the zoo, but when it's free and you can just go whenever you want, slip in, slip out, whatever, the novelty starts to wear off.

[3 : 21] And then once the holy experience is demystified, you really start noticing how sad the whole zoo thing really is. You have these majestic creatures just caged up, just sitting around doing nothing all day so tourists can take selfies with them.

I always found the gorillas at the St. Louis Zoo in particular to have a particularly depressing life because they had this thing called the Gorilla House. At least the lions and everybody else got to be outside the gorillas.

They lived in this like faux cave that they weren't tricking the gorillas at all. It was just this little room with kind of some faux rocks and a big glass window, no sunlight.

They threw a few toys in there for the gorillas to play with and they just sat there. These huge mighty gorillas just sat there all day while kids just bang on their glass. They just tolerated kids. It's a gorilla, it should be tearing that kid's limbs off and it's just sitting there letting a kid bang on his glass all day.

It's a very sad thing to see something as mighty as a gorilla tamed. Our passage today likewise, it's a very sad passage.

[4 : 27] That picture of this majestic creature caged up in this house not able to do what a gorilla is supposed to do.

That's the picture of our passage this morning. Perhaps more than any other passage in the gospels, this is the saddest because what we see is a domesticated Jesus, a caged Jesus, a tamed Jesus.

Again in the context of Mark's gospel, this is very new and unexpected. Nobody sees this coming as you're reading Mark. In chapter five he's been majestic, he's calmed the storm, a legion of demons has begged him for mercy.

He raises the dead body of a little girl, the supremacy and the majesty of this man has been breathtaking, but here in chapter six the lion is caged.

What has been wild and terrifying and glorious in chapter six becomes boring and his power is restrained and contained. What could possibly tame King Jesus?

[5 : 30] The answer is disturbing. I'm going to tell you that up front because it's something we in our context and again I say we, your context and my context in the southern states of America which we would call the Bible Belt.

It's something we are very familiar with. This is a very serious passage, a dangerous passage I would even say. I think we'd be wise to give it our full attention. Here's how I'm going to come at it. First all I want to do with the passage is I want to identify the problem. Secondly I want to look at the consequences of the problem and then thirdly I want to look at the solution to the problem. So basically I'm going to ask what's the problem here, what are the consequences, what can we do about it?

Let's start with identifying the problem. What's the problem of the passage? Says he went away, verse one, he went away from there and came to, and it's very important, his hometown and his disciples followed him.

And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue and many who heard him were astonished saying where did this man get these things and what is this wisdom given to him, how are such mighty works done by his hand?

[6 : 28] So through two verses here in chapter six this all sounds very typical of Jesus. He is coming to town as he always does. He starts preaching at the synagogue as he does and very amazed, people are amazed by them.

But then things get derailed in verse three. Notice that. Wait a minute. Is not this the carpenter? The son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon are not these sisters here with us?

Jesus is about to win the town over and amaze them as he always does, a stumbling block arises. And did you catch what the stumbling block is?

You know what the stumbling block is? Familiarity. You're saying wait a minute, that's the town carpenter. I can remember him playing in the streets.

He built me my chair. That's just Jesus. He's not a big deal. Now this is a huge problem.

[7 : 29] One that Jesus laments in verse four. He says a prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household. He's saying I've been revered everywhere except among those who know me best.

They're used to Jesus. And it's this familiarity that stands in the way of seeing Jesus for who he truly is. Simply put, he's too normal to be glorious.

Jesus has been domesticated. And that is a deadly, serious condition. Look at verse five. We're in those amazing verses in all of the gospels.

And he could do no mighty works there except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. That is fascinating to me.

The Greek is as strong as the translation conveys. Mighty Jesus could do no mighty works except a few token healings. All of his healings in the gospels, everywhere and every place, his healings are death to life, right?

[8 : 40] Amazing. There's no way this cannot be the Son of God. The blind see, the deaf hear, the lepros are clean, the lame walk, even the dead are raised from one extreme to another.

Hear what he gets to do? He's healing a few people with the flu. Just token healings. Apparently, this domestication, this over familiarity is literally the greatest enemy to the power and work of Jesus Christ.

Greater than storms, greater than a legion of demons, greater even than death in chapter 5. And to be perfectly honest with you, what I just said should terrify all of us.

Our context in particular needs this passage. Why? Because we're so familiar with Jesus. If Jesus had any home over the past, let's say century, would it not be Western Christianity, Western culture?

And if Reformed Presbyterianism is the truest expression of Christianity, which we all know it is, just kidding. But if Reformed Presbyterianism is, in our estimation, the greatest expression of true orthodoxy, then narrowing it down even further, you could even say it's not just the West that has been the home of Jesus over the past century, it's Scotland, then narrowing it down even further.

[10 : 19] Maybe if you don't think that, you need to know that we in American Reformed evangelicalism, we see that that way. Y'all are our parents. We look at your culture, we look at your history, and we just, we appreciate all that you have done before us.

But narrowing it down even further, I mean we're in Edinburgh, Knox is down the street, I was in his standing next to his pulpit yesterday.

Like, am I in Edinburgh or Nazareth? This is the seat, this is the home, viewing things through the lens of this passage, you know what that means?

This means that you could actually be in grave danger, that this culture, this country, this society could be in grave danger, because ironically this passage is telling us that those most familiar with Jesus are often the most likely to reject Jesus.

That's what we're seeing in the States. Those who just grow up with this nominal over familiarity with Jesus are the most likely to reject Jesus.

[11 : 39] Nothing is what I'm trying to say. Nothing is more dangerous to a culture and to a soul, to a society and to an individual.

Nothing is more dangerous than nominal Christianity. Nothing is scarier than a condition, this lukewarm condition that is over familiar with Jesus and is bored with Jesus.

And that's what we need to see from this text. We've seen the problem, let's look at the consequences of the problem, because they're big. What are the consequences? Look at verse 3. It's not this carpenter, this is the carpenter, the son of Mary, brother James, Joseph, Jude, Simon are not these sisters here with us, and then look at this, and they took offense at him.

Do you see what happened there? The over familiarity gives way to offense, all right? It's not hard to make that connection, how that works. Imagine yourself watching this young man grow up, him being your peer perhaps, your friend, the little neighborhood kid, and then him turning around one day and say, repent and bow down to me as your Lord and Savior.

I think we could all understand why that would be so offensive. When you preach Jesus into a context that has never heard of him, well, radical allegiance only seems natural, right?

[13 : 04] I mean, this is what missionaries tell us. When they take Jesus into a culture and into a context where they've never heard the gospel, they hear it and it becomes this radical, I'll give my life away, allegiance.

When they hear, oh, hold on, you mean God became man? And he died on a cross as my atoning sacrifice, and he's actually risen from the dead? Yeah, I think that deserves my life and my allegiance.

But when we live in a context where the incarnation, God becoming man, is played over the speakers of our department stores during the busiest shopping times of the year, when his atoning cross is so common that it's become jewelry and tattoos, when his resurrection has morphed into a day of pastels and chocolate bunnies, when that Jesus that a culture is so familiar with, when that Jesus says, repent and bow down, you know, it feels like it feels like your nursery rhyme's telling you to do so.

So they say, who do you think you are, Jesus? An unimpressive, domesticated and boring Jesus has no right at all for to all of a sudden start making claims on our lives.

So to those who are overly familiar with Jesus, his demands are not lovely, they're offensive.

They're not powerful, they're silly. They are not life giving, they are inconvenient.

[14 : 32] And there you have the stumbling block of your culture. This is Western society at large, and I would say Scotland in particular.

This Jesus that they have become so over familiar with is now offensive. The struggle of Christianity in a culture formed by Christianity is that Christianity has become merely a culture.

I'll say it again. I know it would have gotten me in an amen in the States, but that's okay. The struggle, the struggle of Christianity in a culture formed by Christianity is that Christianity has become merely a culture.

And I'm telling you, this is a big problem. Look at verse six. He marveled because of their unbelief. You know, elsewhere in the gospels, he's always marveling at their belief.

He's marveling at their faith. Here's the one time where he marvels at their unbelief. Jesus is astounded by their rejection and unbelief.

[15 : 41] In other passages, he's always saying, whoa, look at your faith. But in our passage, he says, whoa, look at your lack of faith. He is astounded that those who could know him so well still do not believe.

They of all people, his home, his friends, his very family, those most familiar with him are the very ones refusing to him. And then it gets really sad that last phrase is so scary.

And he went about among the villages teaching. Why do you think Mark put that there? And he went about among the villages teaching. You know what that's saying?

Jesus moved on. Jesus moved on. He got tired of it. He said, okay, fine, I'm out. I'm done.

Think about that. Think about that. In chapter five, he looked at a raging storm. He did not back down. In chapter five, he looked at the demonic powers of hell and did not back down.

[16 : 42] He stood over the corpse of a dead little girl and he did not back down. But in the face of domestication and belittling familiarity, he leaves town and hands them over to their unbelief.

And this condition is so offensive to him, so ugly and insulting that he just leaves. Do you know how scary that is? He will not be belittled and he will not be patronized forever.

The ultimate consequence of this condition is that the time will come when Jesus will leave us alone. Is that the West? Is that Scotland? Has Jesus moved on from our culture's patronizing familiarity, perhaps?

I wouldn't blame him if he did. I certainly wouldn't blame him if he did that to the states. But all we can do as those followers of Jesus who inhabit this culture is to cry aloud with our lives, with our voices, with every breath within us.

Remember your first love. Remember your lion. That's the only hope. You remind those most familiar with Jesus of the true glory of Jesus.

[17 : 58] And that's how I want to end. Doing that to you, to your souls, and then hopefully that overflowing from your lives. We've seen the problem. We've seen the consequences of the problem.

Let's close by asking, what can we do about this? Is there a solution to over familiarity domestication of Jesus? I mean, what are we supposed to do, right? Get less familiar with Jesus? Is that the answer? Is going to church a bad thing? Is cataclyzing our children a bad thing? Don't we want a Christian environment? And I would say, of course, of course.

I would actually say the way to avoid what happens in our text is more Jesus, not less Jesus, more familiarity. But here's the point.

We just need to make sure that the Jesus we are getting familiar with is the true Jesus. Their problem was not that they were too familiar with Jesus.

[18 : 55] Their problem is they were too familiar with the wrong view of Jesus. They needed to unlearn what they had always thought of Jesus and get to know the true Jesus.

Again, look at verse three one more time. Is not this the carpenter? The answer is no.

That's not who Jesus is. I mean, he is that. But he also happens to be the son of God incarnate, right? He also is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of God's nature.

He also is the spotless righteousness of God in body. He also is the crucified savior. He also is the resurrected Lord. He also is the soon to return judge. He isn't a carpenter.

He is Lord. And they needed to unlearn. All this over familiarity caricature of their Jesus and learn the true Jesus.

[19 : 52] And so do we. One day my friend and I were taking a break from studying and decided to head over to the zoo again. And like I said before, this point the whole thing had become pretty boring.

But we decided to do something different this day that we had never done. Went to the gorilla house. And you know what we did? We tried to pick a fight with the gorillas. We knew banging on the glass wouldn't do it because everyone did that. So we were determined to get them to actually act like a gorilla. So this is what we did. True story. We got right up near the glass.

We figured out who the alpha male was, the gorillas. And we kind of hunkered down and looked mean. And we just stared down the alpha male. And we weren't going to break eye contact or move until he did something.

Especially since there was glass between us. And so we stood there staring at him. And we could tell that he was getting a little perturbed at this.

[20 : 52] And it turned out, turned into this power standoff. And we weren't backing down. And he was starting to realize. And he was pacing and he was kind of looking out the corner.

Well all of a sudden this docile domesticated caged up gorilla finally did the gorilla thing. He charged at us, lowered his shoulder into the glass trying to break through.

When that didn't work he started pounding on the glass trying to get to us. Roaring. I didn't know gorillas roar. Gorillas roar. I said, what's teeth? It was terrifying. You ever seen gorilla teeth? It's terrifying.

So this gorilla is literally trying to break through the glass and tear us apart. I kid you not. True story. Families and children were screaming and sprinting for the echoes.

And my friend and I turned to each other and at the exact same time had the exact same reaction. That was amazing.

[21 : 53] You can't get bored with a gorilla when a gorilla is doing the gorilla thing. The cure to over familiarity with the domesticated biculture Jesus is to stare him down until the true Jesus roars.

You need to see him roar in all of his glory. An unconstrained, uninhibited, wild, untamed savior is what we in the nominal West are desperate to know.

And when I say no, I mean no. Not mere conceptualization, not the catechism answers. I mean the things that we confess piercing us to the core.

So let me tell you about my Jesus. Let him roar and we'll be done. You need to know the Jesus who literally said a word and the galaxies spring into existence and who still in this very moment upholds and sustains all of existence by the word of his power.

If Jesus were to slip up for a second, it's not just that everything would go into chaos. Everything would literally cease to exist. That's how frail and contingent the universe is to this man's voice.

[23 : 08] You need to know the Jesus who is so madly in love with you, so smitten with his people that he would forsake the riches and glories of heaven and tear through the bounds of space and time to come after you.

Everything will stop this Jesus, nothing, whatever it takes to have you as his own, even the unthinkable, he'll become flesh.

You need to know the Jesus who routinely performed acts of miraculous powers. Those stories that you read in the gospels, they aren't fairy tales.

We're not talking Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, street performers out here. He did these things. And a man walked on water. He raised the dead from the grave.

These things actually happened. You need to know the Jesus who became your son. I know you've got filth, wretchedness and shame.

[24 : 17] It's okay, you can quit pretending. We're all together in this. It's there, admit it, and it's ugly. Those things that you're able to hide, you are not able to hide from Jesus.

He sees it, he knows it. By the way, nothing domesticates Jesus more than hiding your sin. Small sin, small savior.

Big sin. True humility, shame, confession. Whoa, what a glorious savior that could handle that. It's my story, and Jesus took it.

The righteous for the unrighteous, the clean for the unclean, the pure for the impure. He took it, not in some ethereal way. Jesus died for my sins. No, no, no. He intimately knew the foul rottenness of my sins, and with broad shoulders, he carried it up the lonely hill of Galgotha to stand before divine justice and say, I would rather this happen to me than to them.

Take it on me. Holy wrath, holy judgment, I'll take it. I would rather happen to me than you. You know the Jesus who broke through the bounds of death and made a mockery of the grave, and in so doing forever vindicated his name.

[25 : 37] Because he has risen from the dead, all that he said was true and all that he did was true. On Easter morning, he displayed once and for all that he is the one true God and that all other gods are merely sad, pitiful inventions of man.

The resurrected Jesus is God. There is no other. He has risen from the dead. You need to know the Jesus who is soon to return and the fullness of majesty and not a creature on earth will be left standing.

His glory will bring us all to our knees, either in glad adoration to receive salvation or in fearful trembling to receive damnation, but either way, every knee is going to bow to this lion.

You need to know the Jesus who will make all things new and all sadness come untrue. Who will be with you forever, who will himself wipe every tear from every eye and will heal every single wound. We talk often about Jesus' power over the ways we sin as we should. We talk far too little about Jesus' power over the ways we have been sinned against.

[26 : 57] He will forgive you for your sins and he will heal you for the injustice and ways you have been sinned against. Every pain untrue, every sadness untrue.

You need to know the Jesus who is so glorious and satisfying that you will be with him forever as a never-ending, never-exhausting fountain of love and satisfaction and joy.

Everything that you long for finds its proper end in this one person. That is the Jesus we need to be familiar with, not some cultural caricature of Jesus, the true Jesus we must know.

That is the Jesus the next generation must know. One direct application that I know is on many hearts here is our children. When we talk about being overly familiar with Jesus and getting bored with Jesus and Jesus leaving behind lukewarm nominalism, I think our thoughts immediately go to our children.

Maybe some of you who are older here this morning think about your children who have maybe gotten bored with Jesus and left, maybe some of you who are younger here are worried, am I just raising my children in this boring Jesus Christian environment?

[28 : 16] Wayward children, fearful that they'll be wayward someday. The only thing I can say to you is this, show them the Jesus who is the true Jesus in his rawest form.

Let him roar within your family. Not a domesticated caricature of Jesus but the true Jesus. Do you know what that means? It means things like this. You can't hide your sins from them. You have to confess your sins and then you have to tell them about Jesus who is strong enough to save a sinner like you.

You got to be honest with them. They need to see him as the Savior who is actually changing your life, who is not just a Sunday morning routine but who actually day by day, weekend, week out is changing your life.

They will be impressed by that Jesus. They will be impressed by a Jesus that transforms their angry dad into a man of tenderness. They will be impressed by a Jesus that transforms their anxious mom into a mom of peace.

They will be impressed by a Jesus that is so precious to their parents that their parents are free to admit their failures openly before their children. Let them see him as the Jesus that you struggle with in prayer and rise early in the morning to meet him in his word.

[29 : 29] Let them see him as the Jesus whom you are willing to sacrifice and costly ways for. The Jesus who owns your finances and owns your time. Let there be no doubt in their little minds that Jesus is the lion of your home.

They may not be excited about a Sunday school Jesus. They will be excited by a lion who is alive and active and transformative in their parents' lives. And if that has not been the case, if I say that and you say, man, I wish I could go back and do it that way.

It's not too late. Repent to them and invite them to join you in the journey to discover Jesus and his glory and majesty. Say to them, I feel like I gave you a boring Jesus.

This is the Jesus who can handle a wretch like me. Join me and let's discover him this way. You need to know the true Jesus. The next generation needs to know the true Jesus. Scotland needs to know the true Jesus. What does nominal lukewarm Christianity need? Our domesticated Jesus needs to be uncaged. Let the lion out and see what happens to a community and that starts with you.

[30 : 36] Isn't this just the carpenter? No, this is not the carpenter. This is your Lord. This is your Savior. He isn't safe, but He is good. Let me pray.

You overwhelm us with both your glory and your grace. Let us taste and see your goodness. Let us leave here enamored by who you are, Jesus. Jesus, we collectively say to you right now that we are sorry for the way that we have patronizingly put you on a shelf, domesticated you, ignored you, and Lord, we all together repent and we say, come out of your cage and wreak havoc on our lives, on this church, on this community, whatever that means, whatever it takes. Jesus, you are Lord. There is no other. May we see you as such. As we sing to you now, all glory be to Christ. May it not just be from our lips, but from our hearts, through Christ we pray. Amen.