

The Gospel of Mark

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Chapter Six

Mark 6:1-3 NASB

*Jesus went out from there and *came into His hometown; and His disciples *followed Him. (2) When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue; and the many listeners were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to Him, and such miracles as these performed by His hands? (3) "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? Are not His sisters here with us?" And they took offense at Him.*

If Capernaum was the place for the healing of Jairus's daughter then Jesus will have traveled southwest to his hometown. Although Nazareth is not specifically mentioned here, it certainly is demanded by context especially with the comment in verse 4. He was born in Bethlehem but His family lived in Nazareth and He grew up there so it would have been natural for Mark to refer to it as His hometown. He then went to the synagogue to teach on a Sabbath. It was custom that synagogues would allow visiting Rabbis to teach. This was probably the first time these people had heard Him teach. But because Jesus did not have the training of other teachers, they could not accept Him. They knew His sisters and brothers so that meant that He was just one of them. Jesus had at least four brothers and an unknown number of sisters and the town people knew all of them. The sisters of Jesus were even in the synagogue with them although apparently the brothers were not there to hear Jesus. We know that James later became associated with the church at Jerusalem and was the author of the book of James so He became a believer. Jude was also probably the author of the book of Jude but we know nothing of Joseph and Simon.

We do not know of any miracles that Jesus performed here so it may be that they heard of His miracles in other places. Because He was from their town and they knew the family they could not believe that He could do any miracles or teach with great wisdom. It is not customary for these people to refer to someone as the son of his mother so some have wondered if this is because Joseph had been dead for some time or if there was a rumor about Jesus being an illegitimate son of Mary. The Greek translated "took offense" is very strong as they totally rejected Jesus and His teaching.

Mark 6:4-6

Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and among his own relatives and in his own household." (5) And He could do no miracle there except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. (6) And He wondered at their unbelief. And He was going around the villages teaching.

Jesus used a proverb that has parallels both in Jewish and Greek literature: familiarity breeds contempt. The difference is that Jesus uses the word “prophet” that is not in the other literature. They identified Him too much with themselves and so rejected Him as anyone special. Mark states something that Jesus could not do and that is a spectacular statement! However it does not mean that Jesus lacked the power to do whatever He wished. Mark emphasizes in His writings that Jesus works His miracles in response to faith and God had not offered such faith to these people so Jesus did not work any miracles among them. I think that we would modify this a bit since He did heal a few people. However He did continue around the small towns in the area teaching those who came forward.

Mark 6:7-13

*And He *summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits; (8) and He instructed them that they should take nothing for their journey, except a mere staff--no bread, no bag, no money in their belt-- (9) but to wear sandals; and He added, "Do not put on two tunics." (10) And He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave town. (11) "Any place that does not receive you or listen to you, as you go out from there, shake the dust off the soles of your feet for a testimony against them." They went out and preached that men should repent. (13) And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them.*

Jesus now prepared the twelve apostles to go out in pairs. They went in pairs because of the need for two or three witnesses to verify the testimony of Jesus (Deut 17:6). He wanted them to be totally dependent upon God to provide for their basic needs so they were only to take a staff and Matthew reports that it was also not required. People usually took an extra tunic to be used for night covering when it became cold but they were also to trust God for a warm place to sleep. They were also supposed to rely totally on God to provide the first place for them to stay that would be where they were to stay during their time in a particular town. If God did not want them to stay in a particular place they would be clear about that direction from the lack of reception and they were to totally reject the place by shaking off the dust of the town. To a Jew the dust from a heathen place was defiling and had to be removed. The shaking off of the dust would have been a clear message to the people there and so would be a testimony against them. The Gospel message brings both salvation and judgment. The Twelve carried out the testimony of Jesus to all they came to as they preached for repentance, casted out demons, anointed with oil and healed many sick people. This mission is only an extension of that of Jesus and their individual missions would not occur until after the resurrection of Jesus. They were now officially functioning as apostles of Jesus, which had not occurred previously. Matthew elaborates on their mission in that they are only to go to the house of Israel, not to Gentiles and not to enter any city of the Samaritans (Matt 10:5-6).

Their preaching was to be done in such a manner as to produce repentance. They went out with faith from their Lord. Later Jesus will send out seventy disciples and they came back full of joy at what they accomplished in the name of Jesus. In this mission they also casted out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. Matthew gives the names of the 12 apostles (Matt 10:2-4). Matthew also reports that Jesus told them to raise the dead (Matt 10:8).

Mark 6:14-15

And King Herod heard of it, for His name had become well known; and people were saying, "John the Baptist has risen from the dead, and that is why these miraculous powers are at work in Him." (15) But others were saying, "He is Elijah." And others were saying, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of old."

The Herod mentioned here is Antipas, son of Herod the Great. When his father died he became tetrarch of Galilee and Perea but was not officially granted the title of king. His ambition to become king led to his downfall in A.D. 39 so perhaps Mark is using the title ironically or just reflecting local custom. It is not known whether the "it" of verse 14 refers to the actions of the Twelve or the actions of Jesus but since Jesus is the focal point it probably refers to the works of Jesus. Many rumors had spread about the identity of Jesus and Herod would have been informed of these statements. John the Baptist did not perform miracles but they may have thought that if he was resurrected he would have that ability. John the Baptist had spoken of Jesus as "the Coming One" but did not specify Him. To those familiar with the OT prophesies, they would have naturally thought John was referring to Elijah (Mal 3:1; 4:5) The third view seemed to be that He was an ordinary prophet and not one as foretold (Deut 18:15-19).

Mark 6:16-20

But when Herod heard of it, he kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" (17) For Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her. (18) For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." (19) Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death and could not do so; (20) for Herod was afraid of John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. And when he heard him, he was very perplexed; but he used to enjoy listening to him.

The view of Herod as to the identity of Jesus was based upon a guilty conscience since he was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. It seems significant that Mark devotes 14 verses to the death of John and only three to his ministry. Some think this is because Mark parallels the passion of John with that of Jesus. Mark then proceeds to give the background for Herod being afraid that Jesus was the resurrected John the Baptist. It was against Jewish law for someone to marry his brother's wife while the brother was still alive (Lev 18:16). John had told Herod this law and so Herodias (the wife of Herod's brother Philip) had a grudge against John. Herod was afraid of John but he could not understand his teachings for the reason that we know well (1 Cor 2:14). This event of Herod is past tense so it had happened before Jesus sent out His Twelve but we cannot know exactly when John the Baptist was beheaded. It is also unclear as to why Mark gives all the details of the event in the verses below that fits between the charge of Jesus to His disciples and their return to Him. This account seems to be an aside that Mark wanted his readers to know more of its details.

The comments by Herod are also reported in Matt 14:1-12 and Luke 9:7-9. Matthew reports in chapter 11 that John heard about what Jesus was doing while he was in prison and he sent word to Jesus wanting to know if He was the Coming One. Jesus then told the messenger to tell John

what He had been doing so that John would know that He was this One. This chronology implies that John was beheaded by Herod during the time of the apostolic mission.

Mark 6:21-28

A strategic day came when Herod on his birthday gave a banquet for his lords and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee; (22) and when the daughter of Herodias herself came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests; and the king said to the girl, "Ask me for whatever you want and I will give it to you." (23) And he swore to her, "Whatever you ask of me, I will give it to you; up to half of my kingdom." (24) And she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist." (25) Immediately she came in a hurry to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." (26) And although the king was very sorry, yet because of his oaths and because of his dinner guests, he was unwilling to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded him to bring back his head. And he went and had him beheaded in the prison, (28) and brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother.(29) When his disciples heard about this, they came and took away his body and laid it in a tomb.

Mark then reports the situation when Herod had John the Baptist beheaded. Herod celebrated his birthday with a banquet for many important people under his command. It seems then that Herodias sent her daughter to dance as part of her plan to get rid of John the Baptist. This dance was probably very lewd and so excited Herod that he made an emotional reactionary promise to her to give her whatever she wanted. Saying that he would give her up to half of his kingdom was certainly not to be taken literally. She left Herod and hurried to her mother for her advice on how to answer Herod. Herodias told her to ask for the head of John the Baptist and she ran to Herod and amplified the request a bit as she asked for the head on a platter and to do so at once. John had tried to protect John the Baptist but he was now in a quandary for many people had witnessed his statement to Salome. Herod then commanded an executioner to bring back the head and it was done. Herod gave the head to Salome who then gave it to her mother. John's disciples came to take the body for a proper burial in a tomb. Herod no doubt thought that he was finished with John but Mark reports that his actions against John continued to haunt him.

Mark 6:30-32

*The apostles *gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. (31) And He *said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) (32) They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves.*

I can't help but wonder why Mark does not report on the apostles' comments regarding the beheading of John the Baptist. There is no more mention of the beheading of John the Baptist but they would have known about it for it certainly must have happened before their mission. The apostles gathered to give a report to Jesus concerning their first ministry at the direction of their Lord. Mark uses the word "apostles" for the first time and it is appropriate for they were on a mission at the direction of their Lord Jesus. This must have been a great mission as many people

were coming to them to the extent that they did not have time to eat. This must have been very exciting to these apostles on their first mission trip. Jesus knew how tiring such a trip was so He wanted them to go away and get some rest. Jesus and the apostles then went in the boat to a secluded place but we are not told its location. The theme of a rest for God's people is present in other Scripture such as in the wilderness after the Exodus. We also read of rest in:

Isa 63:14 NASB As the cattle which go down into the valley, The Spirit of the LORD gave them rest. So You led Your people, To make for Yourself a glorious name.

Jer 31:2 NASB Thus says the LORD, "The people who survived the sword Found grace in the wilderness-- Israel, when it went to find its rest."

Mark 6:33-36

The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and got there ahead of them. (34) When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things. (35) When it was already quite late, His disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and it is already quite late; (36) send them away so that they may go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

However the people saw them leaving and they were not finished with their interactions with them so they even beat them in going to the other side of the Lake of Galilee. Jesus had wanted to give His apostles some needed rest but His compassion for the people who were sincere in their wanting to interact with them led Him to begin teaching them. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd:

Num 27:17 NASB who will go out and come in before them, and who will lead them out and bring them in, so that the congregation of the LORD will not be like sheep which have no shepherd."

Ezek 34:5 NASB "They were scattered for lack of a shepherd, and they became food for every beast of the field and were scattered.

Now Mark calls the people with Jesus "His disciples" rather than the apostles so perhaps the group with Jesus has now expanded beyond the twelve who were sent on a mission. The disciples noted that it was getting late and they were in a deserted location so it seemed necessary to send the people away to some of the local cities to buy something to eat.

Mark 6:37-44

*But He answered them, "You give them something to eat!" And they *said to Him, "Shall we go and spend two hundred denarii on bread and give them something to eat?" (38) And He *said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go look!" And when they found out, they *said, "Five, and two fish." (39) And He commanded them all to sit down by groups on the green grass. (40) They sat down in groups of hundreds and of fifties. (41) And He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food and broke the loaves and He kept giving them to the disciples to set before them; and He divided up the two fish among them all. (42) They all ate and were satisfied, (43) and they picked up twelve full baskets of the broken pieces, and also of the fish. (44) There were five thousand men who ate the loaves.*

Jesus gave them a command to give the people something to eat. However the disciples looked at the situation very pragmatically and said that it would take an impossible amount of money to feed all those people. 200 denarii is about what a common laborer would earn in an eight-month period (Matt 20:2-15). Jesus gave them another command to determine how many loaves they had. They came back and reported to Him that they had only five loaves and two fish. John tells us (6:9) that these were barley loaves, which were flat and one person could easily eat several of them at a meal. Jesus viewed this as an opportunity rather than an impossibility.

Jesus told them to sit in groups of hundreds and fifties. This would have presented an orderly arrangement for the distribution of the food. Mark gives us some detail about the state of the grass so that we can know this event took place either in late winter or early spring. Mark then tells us that Jesus prayed with a blessing on the food but he does not give us any details about the miracle. Mark simply reports that Jesus broke the loaves and kept giving them to the disciples to set before the people. Similarly Jesus divided the two fish among all the people so that they all ate and were satisfied. The disciples then picked up twelve full baskets of the broken bread and the fish that had fed 5000 men. There would also have been women and perhaps children present also so the number of people who were fed was very large.

Mark 6:45-48

*Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go ahead of Him to the other side to Bethsaida, while He Himself was sending the crowd away. (46) After bidding them farewell, He left for the mountain to pray. (47) When it was evening, the boat was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. (48) Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them, at about the fourth watch of the night He *came to them, walking on the sea; and He intended to pass by them.*

Mark does not give a reaction of the disciples or the crowd to this great miracle. Perhaps the event just seems rather ordinary considering all they had seen Jesus do and that the apostles had done on their mission trip. John does give a bit more information about the reaction of the crowd:

John 6:14-15 NASB “Therefore when the people saw the sign which He had performed, they said, “This is truly the Prophet who is to come into the world.” (15) So Jesus, perceiving that they were intending to come and take Him by force to make Him king, withdrew again to the mountain by Himself alone.”

It seems that the crowd did react to this great miracle by thinking that the Prophet had now arrived. Jesus did not want them to lift Him up as this promised Prophet so He sent away the crowd and went to the mountain to pray alone with the Father. Bethsaida is on the northeast shore of the Lake of Galilee and must have been close to the location of the miracle. Mark seems to be reporting that Jesus sensed a crisis for it is only on three such occasions that He goes away to pray:

- 1.) After the excitement and activity of a busy Sabbath in Capernaum (1:35)
- 2.) After the multiplication of the loaves (6:46)
- 3.) In Gethsemane after the Lord’s supper (14:32-36)

Since it was already very late when the 5000 were fed, it must have been late at night by now. The Lake of Galilee is only about four miles wide so a boat in the middle of the lake could easily be seen from the shore in the full moon of Passover time. Apparently a strong wind had blown

the disciple's boat off course and they were straining to get it in the correct direction. A narrow, shallow lake can build up large waves very easily as we have seen when sailing our boat on a reservoir in Mississippi. Jesus then walked on the water toward them at about the fourth watch that would have been 3-6 A.M. The impression of the witnesses was that Jesus was about to walk past them.

Mark 6:49-52

*But when they saw Him walking on the sea, they supposed that it was a ghost, and cried out; (50) for they all saw Him and were terrified. But immediately He spoke with them and *said to them, "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid." (51) Then He got into the boat with them, and the wind stopped; and they were utterly astonished, (52) for they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened.*

They must have been terrified when they saw Him walking on the sea so that they first thought they were seeing some sort of water spirit. Jesus surely sensed their fear and quickly told them to be of good courage for who you are seeing is I so do not be afraid. I guess that would have calmed me some but I would still be frightened at the realization that Jesus was indeed Lord of the sea. When He got into the boat with them the wind stopped and they were completely astonished even though He had previously shown them His power of the forces of nature. Mark reports that their astonishment was due to the fact that they did not really understand what had happened at the feeding of the 5000. Mark reports that their heart was hardened. Mark can indeed report this fact because he is writing this after the ascension and Pentecost so he can now look back, as we all can, and realize that our heart was hardened at that time.

Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. (54) When they got out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, (55) and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was. (56) Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured.

Remember that there is no town called Gennesaret but this name refers to a region. Shortly after mooring at the shore the people saw Jesus and immediately recognized Him. What a commotion these people caused as they ran about the country bringing people on pallets to be healed. Wherever He went the people followed and brought their sick for healing. Jesus was a Jew and would have worn the tassels and fringes commanded by God (Num 15:37-39; Deut 22:12). It was not any superstitious touching that caused the healings but the faith of the people so that when they touched His garments they were healed (5:25-34).