

Mark 6

An Outline

- I. A Prophet Without Honor (Mark 6:1-6a)
- II. Jesus Sends Out the Twelve (Mark 6:6b-13)
- III. John the Baptist Beheaded (Mark 6:14-29)
- IV. Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand (Mark 6:30-44)
- V. Jesus Walks on the Water (Mark 6:45-56)

Issues for Discussion

1. **A Skeptical Reception in Nazareth (Mark 6:1-6)** – Jesus goes from Capernaum on the western coast of the Sea of Galilee to his hometown of Nazareth, a full day’s walk in a southwesterly direction. He arrives on the Sabbath and preaches in the synagogue there. The people of Nazareth recognize that (1) Jesus has something special (“Where did this man get these things?”), (2) He has extraordinary wisdom (“What’s this wisdom that has been given him?”), and (3) He is doing remarkable miracles (“What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?”). So far so good, right? But instead of concluding that Jesus is Who He claims to be, namely, the Messiah, the Son of God, they immediately observe three counterpoints: (1) He is an ordinary carpenter by profession, (2) He is an ordinary son and brother to townspeople that they know, namely, Mary, James, Joseph, Judas and Simon, and (3) He even has ordinary sisters that still live there. So, instead of concluding that Jesus is the Messiah, they decide that there is nothing special about Him (“And they took offense at him.”).

Because Jesus was “familiar” to them, they decide that there must be nothing special about Him. Jesus responds, “A prophet is not without honor except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home.” All the great prophets of the Old Testament, who Jesus’s hometown Jews hold in high esteem, also had fairly normal lives and families, but this does not take away from the honor accorded them by God. They were commended for their words and works, not their secular profession or their family relations or their residence. Yet, Jesus was being judged by these very things with no consideration of His extraordinary words and works!

Miriam and Aaron, Moses’s brother and sister, spoke against him because of his Cushite wife, saying, “Has the LORD only spoken through Moses? Hasn’t He also spoken through us?” (Numbers 12:1). God immediately calls them out and rebukes them, extolling Moses as someone He deemed greater than a prophet (“With him I speak face to face”) and challenging their misdirected boldness: “Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?” Miriam is struck with leprosy until Moses prays for her healing. Jesus was receiving the same kind of disrespect, criticism, even unbelief.

Then, Mark writes something that sounds unusual to us: “He *could not* do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. He was amazed at their lack of faith”

(Mark 6:6). When we read “could not,” we typically understand these words to mean the lack of ability rather than the lack of willingness; however, the latter is certainly the meaning here. Jesus did not need others to believe for Him to do His miracles, for we have seen Him perform miracles where no faith could be present (e.g. when he raised Jairus’s daughter, a corpse from a coffin in a funeral procession, or Lazarus after four days in a tomb).

The parallel in Matthew gives a more understandable statement: “And he *did not do* many miracles the because of their lack of faith” (Matthew 13:58). In other words, Jesus chose not to do many miracles because there was no faith for the miracles to stoke.

Another example in the Gospels, where “could not” does not mean lack of ability, is Luke 14:20, where one who was invited to a banquet replies, “I just got married, so I can’t come.” Does this man not have the ability to come? No, he chooses not to come because he wants to stay with his wife since they just got married.

Even in our vernacular, we often say, “I can’t come to the party. I have another engagement.” Does this mean that we do not have the ability to come? No. We choose to go to our other engagement. It’s just an expression. When I tell my daughter, “I can’t play Monopoly with you at this moment. I’ve got to finish preparing this Sunday lesson,” I am not speaking of my capacity but of my present priority. Or if I tell her, “I can’t help you with that,” when she’s cleaning her room and asks for help, it’s again not a matter of ability but my desire to teach her to take ownership of things.

Therefore, in our passage, Jesus could not do any miracles in his hometown because to do so would have compromised His mission, which was to use miracles to confirm faith in Him as the Messiah, the Son of God. Jesus did nothing haphazardly or inconsistent with His mission (cf. Matthew 12:19-20).

2. **The Discipleship Way of Jesus (Mark 6:6b-13)** – Jesus goes around teaching (and doing miracles) from village to village, and He gives the command and authority for His chosen twelve disciples to do the same (cf. Mark 1:14, 39 and Mark 6:12-13). Jesus sends them two by two. They are given “authority over impure spirits,” but their power is not limited to simply exorcisms, for they also performed healings (Mark 6:13). Jesus tells them only to take a traveling staff but “no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.” They were to live only on the generosity of the town and home that welcomed them. They were not to move around from house to house in a given town. In the instance that a home rejected them, they were simply to leave without argument or complaint, shaking the dust off as a testimony against them.

Jesus does not give this method as an exact model for us to use today; however, we can consider the wisdom of His approach. First, the disciples were given power that we are not necessarily given today. Unlike the U.S., they were in a culture that was generally hospitable to strangers. Yet, later, when Jesus commands, “Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19), we can understand a bit of what Jesus meant by “make disciples,” as we see him doing this with His disciples. They did what He did. They preached that people should repent. They drove out demons and healed people. Discipleship involves replicating ourselves in others. Paul would write to the Corinthian believers, “Follow my example, as I follow the

example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Again, he would tell the believers in Philippi, “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice” (Philippians 4:9). What is more, Paul would provide the instruction to continue this ministry of replication. He tells Timothy, “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others” (2 Timothy 2:2).

The heart of discipleship is replication. Jesus taught His disciples how to live and minister. He also showed them by example and pointed instruction. He also confirmed that they understood His meaning and followed His way correctly. Finally, He commanded them to replicate themselves (discipleship: teach, show, confirm, replicate) in others, who would do the same for still others.

Class, what am I trying to teach you? I am trying to teach you to read the Bible for yourselves, every day, as a daily discipline. To learn all you can about it. I am trying to teach you to also daily praise and pray for one another. I would also encourage you to make memorizing Scripture a daily discipline. Jesus memorized Scripture, for that’s how He was able to so authoritatively answer the devil’s temptations in the wilderness (cf. Matthew 4:1-11). I also want you to know how to comfortably share your faith with others. I would also encourage you, especially the fathers among you, to prioritize the spiritual training of your children. I am not only trying to teach this to you, I also want to show you through my own example. And as you share with me your progress, I will confirm whether you are believing and practicing rightly. Finally, when you are doing what I am doing, I would want you to find people and opportunity to replicate yourselves in others. Let me repeat the model of discipleship: TEACH, SHOW, CONFIRM, REPLICATE.

Jesus told His disciples to take no money or supplies in their itinerant ministry; however, is this applicable to you today? Mark 6 is a description, not a prescription, but you can learn from Him. When Paul refused to take money from the churches he founded and ministered to, it was because he did not want it to be a hindrance to his ministry, whether through greed or through the perception of greed (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:12, 15-18). Megachurch pastors make upwards of \$200,000 a year, not to mention, many tens of thousands of dollars in benefits, far beyond their average parishioner; however, they have to answer to God whether or not this is a hindrance to their ministry of the Gospel. We are not to be preoccupied with what they get or don’t get but simply to be faithful to our own calling. Even so, I praised God to learn that W.A. Criswell decided to give back his entire salary and take no further salary from the church. Perhaps that had something to do with his exceptionally long tenure at First Baptist Dallas. Here’s some interesting info about Criswell and Rick Warren, the well-known pastor of Saddleback Church in California (source: <https://thegathering.com/what-then-is-my-pay/>):

In 1974 W.A. Criswell, the longtime pastor of First Baptist Dallas, announced that he was giving back “every penny” he earned in salary during his 30 years as pastor. An [article in the Baptist Press](#) reported Dr. Criswell as saying, “The first time I preached in a church, the deacons took up a collection and I was given \$10. I gave it back to them and told them I did not preach for money.” At the time, he said he did not know how he was going to live without money, “but I had the tremendous feeling that I had given my life to God freely.” The account went on to say that a member of First Baptist Dallas, when

informed of Criswell's decision, remarked, "I think it is a wonderful thing for a great man to do."

I don't know if Rick Warren was inspired by Criswell's example, but in 2005 Rick announced that he was doing the same. He totaled the salary he had received from Saddleback for 25 years and gave it all back. He and his wife, Kay, then became reverse tithers, giving away 90 percent of their income (from book sales, speaking engagements and other sources) and living on 10 percent. "Giving away the money was easy," Rick has stated.

The Bible does not set limits on ministerial compensation. "Those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:14). How much is enough or how much is too much? Ministers should take to heart Paul's words, "But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction" (1 Timothy 6:8-9). There's a big gap between subsistence ("food and clothing") and riches, but Paul likely provided the lower and upper limits in order to keep anyone from being self-satisfied or too comfortable or thinking they are immune from Paul's warning and rebuke.

I'm somewhat of an entrepreneur, and for most entrepreneurs making greater profits lies at the heart of entrepreneurial pursuits; however, as a Christian entrepreneur I always encourage limits. In other words, decide now how much is enough for you and your family. I will not decide this for you. You must decide this for yourselves before God.

3. **Fake News about Jesus and John the Baptist** (Mark 6:14-29) – Jesus and His small band of 12 disciples must have made quite an impression for news to get to King Herod Antipas, tetrarch (ruler of a ¼ of the province) of Galilee. Various rumors were going around. Some claimed Jesus was John the Baptist raised from the dead. Others said Jesus was Elijah. Still others said Jesus was a prophet like the Old Testament prophets. But Herod was convinced that Jesus was John the Baptist, whom he had beheaded, raised from the dead. Of course, none of these rumors were true, but, like today, if you say something often enough and with enough passion, the fake news gets embraced as true news.

Mark and Matthew (Matthew 14:1-12) provide a detailed account of how John died. Luke makes mention of it (Luke 9:9). Why would the shortest of all the Gospel accounts provide so much space to this event? We learn that John the Baptist was imprisoned because he publicly rebuked Herod Antipas for marrying his brother Philip's wife, Herodias. Herodias nursed a grudge against John the Baptist and had to resort to trickery to get her husband to kill him, because Antipas revered John (Mark 6:20) and feared a backlash from the people (Matthew 14:5). But knowing Antipas to be as lusty as he was, she used her daughter-in-law to entrap him into granting her wish. Antipas was ready to replace Herodias with her daughter-in-law Salome at his side but did not anticipate Salome's loyalty to her mother. After dancing for him and making him promise to give her whatever she asked, she asked for the head of John the Baptist.

Mark gives us a detailed glimpse of the political and immoral world of that time through this

event. History records many such intrigues and shenanigans of Herod and other rulers of that age. This is contrasted with the very deliberate and supernatural plan of God as it unfolds in the words and works of Jesus Christ. The world of men, occupied by rumors and intrigues, provides a contrast to the truth and undeterred work of God, manifested in the wisdom spoken and wonders done by the Messiah, the Son of God. So Jesus would teach in Matthew 11:16-19,

⁶ “To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others:

¹⁷ “‘We played the pipe for you,
and you did not dance;

we sang a dirge,
and you did not mourn.’

¹⁸ For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, ‘He has a demon.’ ¹⁹ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.’ **But wisdom is proved right by her deeds.”**

Wisdom is proved right by her deeds. The wisdom of God is contrasted with the folly of men. People believe what they want to believe. They coax and demand, they wheel and deal. Thus, they miss out on the message of God, which was the same from John as from Jesus, though each man came in different clothes and ways. Truth is truth, no matter how it is packaged.

4. **A Climactic Miracle: Jesus Feeds Twenty-five Thousand People (Mark 6:30-44)** – The account of the beheading of John the Baptist serves as kind of intermission to Jesus’ sending out of His twelve disciples. John the Baptist’s ministry is ending while Jesus’s ministry is peaking. John’s ministry ends with his disciples taking his body and laying it in a tomb (Mark 6:29); however, Jesus’s ministry will not end in a tomb but be ongoing with His resurrection and the working of the Holy Spirit through His disciples.

Mark describes Jesus’s ministry at this point as being so busy that they have no time to even eat (Mark 6:31). When Jesus tries to find a solitary place to rest, all the people follow them to the place. It is crazy busy, and it is obvious that they will not be able to eat in peace. The disciples think Jesus should command the people to go and buy themselves something to eat in the nearby villages. Jesus challenges them: “You give them something to eat.” The disciples still do not realize how to think in the presence of the Son of God. Should they take half a year’s wages (around 200 denarii) to try to feed everyone? Then, Jesus asks them to find out if anyone has any food that they would be willing to share. They find one boy with five loaves and two fish.

By the way, other than the resurrection, this is the only miracle of Jesus mentioned in every Gospel account. It is significant. It is climactic. It is the miracle with the largest impact. Mark says 5000 men. The parallels indicate that besides these, there were women and children. John MacArthur suggests there may have been upwards of 25,000 people there.

Back to the account. Why did Jesus ask if there was anyone with any food? Is it because He wanted to highlight someone’s giving – in this case, a small boy with five loaves and two fish. Only John’s Gospel mentions a boy (John 6:9), and he is only mentioned incidentally by Andrew. And there’s no emphasis on the voluntary or sacrificial nature of someone giving. It is stated as a matter of fact. No offense to pastors and theologians, who like to use this as a proof text for

God multiplying our small gifts to the church, I do not believe that is what Jesus was trying to teach here. His questions and commands were intentional (John 6:6). The emphasis of the miracles is never the charity or sacrifice of people but rather the power of God. Here too, the testimony of the disciples and the verified fact that among the thousands there was only five loaves and two fish would prove the genuineness and magnitude of the miracle that Jesus was about to do. Even the twelve baskets of leftovers proved the same. If you look at many of the miracles Jesus performed, there is often a narrative description or questioning by Christ that document the condition of the people who are healed or exorcised. For example, the Bible explains that the man born blind was blind from birth and verified as such by the parents. All the townspeople knew that the lame man sitting by the Pool of Siloam had been lame for years. Everyone in the region of the Gadarenes knew about the men possessed by the legion of demons. So, I don't think the point of the five loaves and two fish were to show that God would multiply our sacrificial gifts, rather it was to show that what Jesus did was a true miracle of great proportion. No one could say otherwise. What is more, that they had to continually come to Jesus to receive new bread and fish to distribute would further validate the miracle that flowed from Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God.

As an aside, this is why I am hesitant to call every healing a "miracle." Rare is the case of any of the modern-day, self-proclaimed healers, like Benny Hinn or the healers affiliated with the International House of Prayer, who document the condition of the people they claim to heal. Everything I've read even as far back as 1911 demonstrated to me that these healings were either psychosomatic or completely false, where either the "cured" sickness returned or else the person progressed in the sickness and eventually died. A well known evangelist, Joni Earekson-Tada, who sought healing everywhere, was not only disappointed with the failure to be healed but angered to find out that most every healer she encountered was either a charlatan or deeply deceived.

Note also the nature of this miracle is quite remarkable. The bread was not grown and the fish were not birthed. Jesus performed a creative act as Creator of bread and fish that did not exist before. These again were signs that Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of God.

This event catapults Jesus's popularity to its heights, but when we read the fuller, post-miracle account in John's Gospel, the reaction is not what we expect. In John 6:25-71, when Jesus teaches these very people, who experienced the miracle of creation, they do not receive Him in faith but argue over His words (John 6:41-42, 52) and ultimately reject Him. Even many of His disciples stop following Him (John 6:66). Jesus rebuked them for seeking their fill of food and miracles but refusing to accept Him as their Messiah, who gives them eternal life (John 6:26-27). At this occasion, Jesus also repeatedly affirmed that only those the Father supernaturally drew to Him would believe and be saved (John 6:37-39, 43, 65).

Amazingly, Jesus turns to His Twelve and asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" (John 6:67). Peter, as representative of the Twelve, responds in faith, "Lord to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69). Everyone else was leaving as their ideal of Jesus as Conquering King (cf. John 6:15) was not being realized in Christ, so shouldn't these Twelve, who likely had similar earthly kingdom aspirations, have left as well? This is where the event intervening between the

Feeding of the Five Thousand and Jesus' Bread of Life Discourse comes into play.

5. **Jesus Prays, Walks on Water, and Stills the Storm, and the Disciples Worship and Confess Him as the Son of God** (Mark 6:45-56 with Matthew 14:22-33 with John 6:16-24) – Mark records that Jesus made the disciples get into a boat and go ahead of Him to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45). The parallels confirm this was no request but a command. Jesus then rushed away as the people, after seeing the miracle of the Feeding of the Five Thousand, were ready to make Him king by force (John 6:15). After sending them away, where did Jesus go? He went by Himself up on a mountainside to pray (Mark 6:46). I wonder what He may have prayed about. Foreseeing the coming rejection (John 6:25-71), could He have prayed for His Twelve to have enduring faith, for the Father to draw them and protect them from leaving in unbelief as the other disciples would?

The disciples again encounter a storm they cannot handle. They are struggling against winds and waves that take them deeper out into the sea. But Jesus knows exactly where they are and goes to them walking on the water. They are terrified and think that He is a ghost. After He reveals Himself, Matthew records that Peter asks to come to Jesus on the water. He would soon see that while he needs faith to walk on water, it is not His faith but Jesus that saves Him, for doubts come into his mind and he starts to sink. Jesus saves him, and they go into the boat safely. The winds immediately die down, and they immediately reach their destination. The disciples worship Him, saying, "Maybe this is the Son of God?" – No. They say, "Truly you are the Son of God" (Matthew 14:33) – the first significant confession of faith. Perhaps it is this incident that buttress their faith to respond to Jesus later that day with "To whom shall we go? You have the words of Eternal Life. We have come to know and believe that You are the Holy One of God" (John 6:68-69).

Discussion Questions

1. How are you doing as a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you employing the tools that God has given for you to grow, namely (1) daily Bible reading, (2) daily Bible memorization, (3) daily praise and prayer, (4) regular sharing of Scripture/Gospel with others, (5) prioritizing obedience to His commands (prioritizing God, resisting temptation, fleeing immorality, providing spiritual training for your kids, etc.)? Are you replicating what you know/what you have attained in others? Is discipleship a central part of your life (Teach, Show, Confirm, Replicate)?

2. Those who experienced the miracle of the feeding of the twenty-five thousand followed Jesus for what they could get from Him, how about you? Do you follow God for Who He is or for what He can do for you? Is your delight in Him or in His benefits? When persecution, suffering and loss come, will you still follow Him with all your heart? When the enticement of riches, power, and earthly fulfillment comes, would you be willing to let those go just to follow Him?

If you have access to the internet, I encourage you to consider this pastor turned unbeliever after 40 years in the faith. I think this can happen to anyone if they believe God is a vending machine for a happy and healthy life. Their first major disappointment is sure to crush their faith.

<https://www.christianpost.com/news/after-40-years-megachurch-pastor-slams-christianity-and-quits-deacon-claims-he-had-affair.html>