

## Gospel of Mark: The Beginning of Victory

*“These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.” – I Corinthians 10:11*

The sixth chapter of Mark focuses on the theme of discipleship. We first see the people in Jesus' hometown rejecting him (Mark 6:1-6a). One would think they would be obvious disciples, knowing Jesus from childhood, but they are not. We then read of the first mission of the twelve (Mark 6:6b-13) and the death of Jesus' first disciple, John the Baptist (Mark 6:14-29). The disciples are then given instructions to rest and later to feed the multitude who follow them (Mark 6:30-44). Their encounter with Jesus on the Sea of Galilee leaves them terrified (Mark 6:47-52). Their relationship with Jesus is still only in the beginning stages.

### I. Jesus Comes to Nazareth – Mark 6:1-6a

- a. Jesus comes to Nazareth, his hometown, and teaches in the synagogue on the Sabbath.
- b. The people are “astounded” at him. They ask, literally, “Where did this guy get all this?”
- c. They know his family and yet are offended at him.
- d. “Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown.” Yet prophets in Scripture are often sent back to their hometown. Moses is sent back to Egypt, Isaiah is sent to his native city of Jerusalem and Paul is sent back to Tarsus.
- e. Jesus himself is amazed at their unbelief.
- f. The statement “he could do no deed of power” is ambiguous since he does heal some sick people and their unbelief could hardly prevent him from demonstrating his power. Mark could be saying he could do nothing they would find convincing.

### II. The First Mission – Mark 6:6b-13

- a. Jesus sends out the disciples “two by two.” This suggests discipleship is not to be done by individuals. Later in Acts we read repeatedly of teams of two such as Peter and John and Paul and Barnabas. Individuals presumably would be far more vulnerable.
- b. They are to take no provisions with them. They are to depend on those who will receive them. This doesn't deny their needs but the disciples are not to be concerned about them.
- c. They proclaim that all should repent. This is essentially the same message as John the Baptist (Mark 1:3) and Jesus (Mark 1:15).
- d. They cast out “many demons” and cure “many” who are sick. Again the theme of the demonic is emphasized in Mark (Mark 1:21-28; Mark 3:11,15; Mark 4:22-27; Mark 5:1-13).

### **III. The Death of John the Baptist – Mark 6:14-29**

- a. This story is told in flashback. John is already dead. Herod, hearing of Jesus, is afraid that he is John come back to life.
- b. Herod did not desire John's death or even his imprisonment apparently. He arrested him on account of his wife, Herodias, who actually was "his brother Philip's wife," because John had confronted them with the immorality of their marriage. Herod even enjoyed listening to John (Mark 6:20).
- c. On his birthday which one commentator has literally called a stag party, Herodias' daughter danced before Herod and his guests (her mother according to the text was outside the hall). She so pleased Herod that he offered to give her whatever she wanted.
- d. Salome (her traditional name) "immediately" (the word is used four times in this chapter) goes out to ask her mother who tells her to demand Herod's head.
- e. In a grisly scene found in no other gospel Salome receives John's head on a platter and then goes and gives it to her mother.
- f. John's disciples come and bury his body.

### **IV. The Feeding of the Five Thousand – Mark 6:30-44**

- a. Jesus and the disciples try to get away from the press of the crowds for a rest but the crowds follow them.
- b. It gets late and the disciples tell Jesus to "send them away." Jesus however tells them to feed the crowd. The disciples protest that this would cost too much (this is the first but not the last time this objection has been raised).
- c. Jesus asks what they have. They of course answer that they have five loaves and two fish.
- d. Jesus breaks the loaves and the fish after blessing them. The crowd is fed fully and there are twelve baskets of "broken pieces" left over. Some see these as symbolizing the twelve disciples.

### **V. On the Sea of Galilee – Mark 6:45-55**

- a. Jesus sends the disciples ahead of him onto a boat to cross the sea.
- b. While on the boat the disciples are "straining at the oars against an adverse wind." In the early dawn Jesus appears to them walking on the water. Rather than being encouraged they are terrified. Yet Jesus tells them not to be afraid. They don't understand. Indeed their hearts are hardened. In this respect they are similar to the people in Nazareth.
- c. Jesus comes to the land of Gennesaret. Here the people welcome him and even those who touch the fringe of his cloak are healed.

## VI. Questions for Us

- a. Why do you think the people of Jesus' hometown are so unresponsive to him? Is there a danger in knowing too much about Jesus without really knowing him?
- b. We see various pictures of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus in this chapter. John is beheaded. The twelve are sent out with power but without material provisions. The disciples are also told to feed the multitude and are terrified when they see Jesus walking on the water. How do these examples help us understand our role as disciples today?
- c. Some see Herod in this chapter prefiguring Pilate. Herod, like Pilate, is being pressured to do something he really thinks is wrong in condemning an innocent man. What lessons does this situation have for us? Is there anything symbolic in the fact that the real enemy, Herodias, is outside the hall?
- d. What are the lessons to be learned in our own ministry in the fact that the disciples want to send the people away and Jesus wants to feed them?
- e. Do you think Jesus is amazed at our unbelief at times?
- f. How often do we find ourselves straining against an "adverse wind?" What do you make of the fact that the disciples are terrified of Jesus?