

Finer Grounds

Mark Lesson 5: Jesus' Power Doubted

Before You Begin:

Read Luke 4:24-30

Think About It:

Have you ever been rejected or criticized by those you love dearly? Have you ever had them laugh and scoff at your goals and dreams? If not, imagine how that would feel as we walk through the next events in the life of Jesus the Christ.

In the last lesson we saw Jesus demonstrate his divine power in unmistakable ways. He demonstrated his power over nature, over demons, and even over death. These demonstrations left him with crowds of believers thronging around him everywhere he went. Everywhere, that is, but one place...

Read Mark 6:1-6

Jesus returns to Nazareth, his hometown, and goes straight to the synagogue and begins teaching. Those who heard him were amazed by his authoritative teachings, just as everyone else had been. They were also knowledgeable concerning his miracles, whether he was performing them in person at the synagogue or because word had traveled back to Nazareth.

It is interesting to note that Mark 6:3 is the only passage in Scripture that specifically refers to Jesus himself as a carpenter. Matthew 13:55 refers to him as the "carpenter's son," but Mark elaborates and confirms that in the typical Jewish fashion, Jesus had been a student of his earthly father and learned the family trade. This also means that, while we often do not think about it, Jesus himself had given up a lucrative earthly career for the ministry well before he asked Peter,

James and John to become fishers of men. This passage is also the most exhaustive list we have of Jesus' earthly family.

Think About It:

What does this passage teach us about the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity?

Jesus gave up the career he learned from his earthly father (who by this point had passed away and was only a memory), and he was publicly ridiculed and rejected by his family. Have we endured such difficulties for him in return? If not, why not?

While this passage paints a very discouraging picture of Jesus and his relationship with his mother and siblings, what do we see in Acts 1:14 & 1 Corinthians 9:5?

What does Mark 6:6 tell us about the humanity of Christ?

How does this account compare with the account we read in Luke?

What is the entire reason that Jesus was unable to do many miracles in his hometown?

Read Mark 6:7-13

So far throughout Mark's account of Jesus' ministry the apostles have merely been passive observers. Now Jesus decided that it is time to send them out on their own and see how they do. The use of oil in verse 13 is interesting because this first journey of the apostles is the only time it is mentioned in correlation with miracles. Oil was considered to be a healing agent in the first century, and some have suggested that the apostles used it on this first trip in order to instill confidence in their abilities in those they were striving to help (Lenski 1961).

Think About It:

What can we learn about discipling from how and when Jesus sent his apostles out?

How does the message of the apostles compare to the message of John the Baptist?

What does this tell us about what Jesus expects us to teach?

How does this fit with the mentality of today's American society?

What is the significance of Jesus forbidding the apostles from taking supplies with them?

Why did Jesus tell them to knock the dust from their feet wherever their teachings were unwelcome?

How does this fit with Matthew 7:6?

What can we learn about evangelism from these passages?

Based upon Matthew 7:6, what is the reason for knocking the dust from our feet and not throwing pearls before swine?

Read Mark 6:14-29

This passage is a shocking interruption to Mark's recording of the ministry of Christ. It tells the fate of the first Gospel evangelist, and begins a pattern of death that will follow many of Jesus' followers throughout the centuries, including all of his apostles with the exception of John. It also gives us insight into why Herod was afraid of Jesus, and did not want to bring him harm.

Think About It:

Why did Herod arrest John the Baptist?

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What persecutions do we experience for teaching from God's word today?

Why did Herodias have a grudge against John?

The phrasing, "your brother's wife" in verse 18 is particularly worth noting. While it was unlawful according to Jewish law, Herod and Herodias considered themselves to be married (Lenski 1961). The phrasing here, however, is plain. Regardless of the mess these two have gotten their lives into, God still viewed Herodias as being married to her first husband.

Verse 20 tells us that while John's teachings were confusing to Herod, he heard them gladly. Yet that gladness was not enough to protect John when sin further entered the picture. First we need to note that at this point in time Herod is showing off. The entire purpose of this gathering, and the guest list, is to demonstrate how wealthy and powerful Herod is. In the midst of this drunken revelry of a power display, Herod sends for his stepdaughter and has her dance before the company. This young lady comes into the presence of these men, and moves her body in such a way that Herod is enticed to offer her anything she wants, which results in John the Baptist being beheaded. When verse 22 says that her actions, "pleased" Herod the word means "to bring sexual enjoyment" (Soanes 2004). While an in-depth study of dancing is outside of the purview of this lesson, it is important to notice that it is entirely possible for a young lady to move her body in such a way as to stimulate sexual arousal in men. As Christian women, we would do well to remember this, and to remind our daughters and granddaughters of this.

Now keep in mind, Herod did not want to harm John, yet in his drunken stupor he had boldly made this promise in front of all of his guests, and his pride would not let him back down when Herodias' daughter requested that he brutally kill John. As a result of other's sin, beginning with Herod's unscriptural marriage to Herodias and culminating in erotic dancing and pride, John lost his life.

Think About It:

What can we learn about the ways in which Herod & Herodias each reacted to John's teachings?

If Herod received John's teachings gladly, why had he not changed his life?

Have you ever been hurt by the sins of others? How did you react?

Have you ever hurt others by your sins?

Take Action:

At some point or another, we have all hurt someone we care about because of sin in our lives, whether that sin is a bad temper, bad stewardship, pornography, slothfulness, or any number of other things. One of the hardest things to do, however, is to acknowledge that hurt and apologize. Humble yourself enough to apologize to someone that you have hurt, and ask them to help you do better.

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Read Mark 6:30-44

Mark now returns to the ministry of Christ, just as the apostles are coming back from their first “mission” trip. You can imagine the exhausted exuberance of the apostles as they come back in groups of two and report to Jesus all that they had done in his name. Jesus recognizes their need to recharge, so they get in the boat and set sail in an effort to have some quiet time to recharge.

Unfortunately by this time, however, they are simply too well-known, and they are followed by a great multitude. Once again Mark demonstrates the humanness of Christ, as he feels compassion for the crowd and begins to teach them. The interaction that takes place next between Jesus and his apostles is almost humorous. They come to Jesus and point out the hunger of the people, to which Jesus responds, “fix it.” These men have just come from performing all kinds of miracles by the power of Christ, yet the idea miraculously providing food never even enters their minds. Instead, in shock they quote Jesus the price tag on catering. Once again Jesus demonstrates his patience as he simply has the apostles round up the available food: five loaves and two fish, and proceeds to feed the people.

Not only did Jesus miraculously provide enough food for all 5,000 men (plus any women and children who were there) but there were 12 baskets of food leftover. I think a lot of the time when we picture these baskets we picture large baskets of food which could possibly have gone to waste. In actuality, these were rather small baskets such as would have been used to carry a lunch in. This means Jesus made just enough to feed those who were present, and provide the next meal for his apostles (Lenski 1961).

Think About It:

Even after everything they had been through together, the apostles didn’t even consider a miraculous solution to their problem. Are there times when, after everything God has done for us, we fail to consider a divine solution to our problems?

How do you think the multitude would have reacted as the apostles began dividing them into groups?

Note that it is the apostles, not the multitude, that approach Jesus. Why do you think this is?

Take Action:

For at least a week set aside a specific time each day to spiritually recharge. It can be in the morning, evening, or even during your kiddo’s nap time, but make sure that it’s at least 30 minutes of quiet time with your God without any distractions, including television or radio.

Read Mark 6:45-56

Jesus’ plan for rejuvenation did not go according to plan, so now he is going to try again. He sends the multitudes away, puts his apostles into a boat, and then goes up onto the mountain to talk to his Father. It appears that Jesus prayed for several hours, and then went to join his apostles. Due to the rough water they were still sailing, and the quickest path to them was straight across, so Jesus began walking on the water. For

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the second time that day, Jesus' miraculous abilities do not even cross the apostle's minds. They are terrified because they believe they see a ghost. Even after Jesus reassures them and gets in the boat, the apostles are astounded and do not understand, either the walking on the water or the miracle of the loaves.

It is interesting to note that historically Mark received his information from Peter (via the Holy Spirit), typically Mark is the most prone to point out the shortcomings of the apostles, yet Mark does not include Peter coming to Jesus on the water (Matthew 14:28-33). This also leaves out Peter's great confession of "Truly you are the son of God" found in Matthew 14:33.

Why might this be? What could Mark be emphasizing instead by leaving out this part of the account?

Think About It:

Scripture says that this occurred during the fourth watch of the night, how did Jesus see the apostles?

What does it mean when verse 52 says that the apostles' hearts were hardened?

Take Action:

Make a list of specific areas of your life that may be hardened to the truth of God's word, and commit to pray for those areas of your life every day for the next week.

And then, Jesus and his apostles reach the shore once more, and are immediately greeted by the multitudes. Despite the doubt exhibited by Jesus' family and even the apostles at times, the faith of the crowds is only growing. Verse 56 tells us that by this point the crowds don't even feel the need to speak to Jesus, but rather are jostling him, trying to touch even the fringe of his garment.

Think About It:

Where would the idea of healing by touching the hem of Jesus' garment have come from?

Do we reach for Jesus for healing with our spiritual sickness with the same enthusiasm as those who needed his physical healing?

Lenski, R. C. H. (1961). *The Interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House.

Soanes, C., & Stevenson, A. (Eds.). (2004). *Concise Oxford English dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.