

A Study of Mark's Gospel

Week Eight

Mark 6:3-29

Day One

³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, ^a Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. ⁴ Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ⁶ And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

v. 3 – The people where Jesus lived knew His family and, therefore, they had a hard time receiving or understanding what He was doing. Notice that Jesus came from a big family. The Catholics like to say that those named here were Jesus' cousins. That is pretty far-fetched. Jesus had at least four brothers and two sisters. The girls aren't named, just referred to in the plural. Also notice that Joseph, his father, isn't mentioned here, so he just have passed away by now.

Jesus understood family life and pressures so He knows how families can behave. None of His family, except perhaps Mary, believed in Him or His mission:

But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:2-5).

Does your family believe in you and your purpose? If so, great. If not, have you let it hinder your ability to function? I hope not.

v. 4 – Why is a prophet not without honor except in his hometown? I think it's because people are so familiar with the prophet, with all her failings and shortcomings, so that it is hard for people to receive from that person. It's difficult for people to look at the source being God and not the person they know and grew up with.

The statement Jesus made about the prophet being without honor seems to have been a proverb of the day, but it is not mentioned any other place in Scripture. It is true, of course, in more cases than not. **Is it true in your case?** I know you may want those who are closest to you and who know you best to be your biggest supporters, but it is beyond your control. So you must go where you are celebrated and not just tolerated if you are going to have your biggest impact for the Lord and your purpose.

v. 5 – As we saw Matthew also report, Jesus could not do many miracles in this place. He was like a fish out of water, faith being the water in which this miracle-working "fish"

had to perform. It is one of the hardest lessons to learn that you should not try to do your purpose work in an environment that isn't open to your presence or effect. This is why Jesus advised in other places to move on, shaking the dust from your feet, if you are not welcome. **Do you struggle with that concept?** I know I do.

v. 6 – We have a *wow* ⁷ here, but this time in reverse. The people were not amazed at Jesus, but Jesus was amazed at them, for the wrong reason. He was amazed at their lack of faith! *Lord, don't let me amaze You for this same reason. Let me amaze You by my faith, just like the centurion. You saw his faith and marveled. May You see mine and do the same.*

Day Two

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil ^b spirits. ⁸ These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff — no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. ¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.

vs. 6b&7 – Jesus was an itinerate preacher and teacher. I am sure He preached the same message in different places, which may account for why some of the gospel accounts vary. In some sense, you could say that Jesus was here on earth on a teaching mission. Today, I know people who go on medical missions, on evangelism missions, building missions, or a relief aid missions. Most of the foreign missions that I do are teaching missions.

Speaking of missions, when was the last missions' trip in which you were involved? Do you give to support any missions work? Are you praying for any missionaries? Everyone can give, pray or go, and some can do all three? With which of the three are you involved? If your answer is none, then I think you will need to explain to Jesus what part of the Great Commission you didn't understand, or which part you didn't think applies to you:

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

Jesus then gave the Twelve authority over evil spirits and sent them out, presumably to confront and cast those spirits out of the people, just like Jesus had done. The question here is whether Jesus only gave this authority to those Twelve or does He give it to all His disciples? What do you think? If He is still giving this kind of authority, then what are you doing with it? When was the last time you confronted evil and used your God-given authority to send it away?

vs. 8&9 – Wow! Jesus asked the Twelve to completely rely on Him as they went out. **Now I have another question for you? Is this how everyone should go whom Jesus sends or was these instructions for this particular trip?** My understanding is that it was for this particular trip. The principle, however, of trusting God as we go forth to do His will applies to every situation where we go to serve. I pack a suitcase whenever I go, and I don't feel like I am violating Scripture. I have learned and am learning, however, to trust the Lord for His provision as I go. I believe that is in harmony with the intent of what Jesus said here.

v. 9 – As I read this, I am rethinking how I pack for trips. I have concluded that I take too much stuff with me! I do not trust the Lord as I should whenever I do that. Jesus said to take sandals (what I need), but not an extra tunic (what I think I *may* need). I always end up with too much clothing and it weighs me down on my trips. I will change my packing habits after having read these verses.

v. 10 – I don't like staying in private homes when I travel, having had more than a few bad experiences when I did. Once I stayed in a home where we all shared a bathroom (the couple and three small children). Plus there was no heat in my bedroom in the dead of winter. At another home, I was assured that it was a quiet place where many out-of-town guests had stayed. To this day, that particular stay was one of the noisiest, most disruptive visits I ever had. I know that Jesus wanted the Twelve to connect with the people of the community where they were ministering. For me, I still prefer a hotel.

Day Three

¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." ¹² They went out and preached that people should repent. ¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. ¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

v. 11 – If a place did not accept the Twelve, then the residents there were not ready to receive the message the Twelve carried. Jesus' instruction to the Twelve was to move on and find a place that was ready and open. This is a good ministry principle to follow, but a tough one to apply. **How do we know that an area won't yield fruit with just a little more work and preparation?** We don't know, but the rule should be to move on as quickly as possible if our work does not seem to yield to our presence.

I think we should always be looking for a reason to *stop* the work we are doing, especially where a mission outreach is concerned. Too often we do the opposite, not wanting to abandon the work that has been invested in hopes of a breakthrough. For instance, I went to Singapore three years in a row, mostly at my own expense. After three years, I had little to show for my efforts. I am open to going back there, but right now my work in Africa yields so much more fruit that I cannot justify going back to

Singapore. So I have had to put Singapore on hold while I pursue other work that is showing results. This “bottom line” approach makes many people uncomfortable where ministry is concerned. I often hear, “If only one person was helped, it was all worth it.” While that sounds spiritual, it is contrary to the advice in this verse.

v. 12 – The Twelve went out and did what they had seen Jesus do. They preached that the people should repent. **I wonder what kind of results they got and how the people responded? I wonder what kind of speakers the Twelve were? Did they gather big crowds? Were the people hoping to see Jesus? Did Jesus follow up their preaching with a visit?**

v. 13 – The Twelve got the same results that Jesus did. They saw demons flee and the sick healed. I find it interesting that they anointed people with oil. I think of that as a New Testament Christian practice. It seems that it was not unheard of in Jesus’ day. **Do you pray for the sick and they are healed? Do you speak to demons and they come out of people’s lives? If not, why not? If so, how can you do more of that kind of ministry?**

v. 14 – As I said earlier, Jesus was a celebrity and here his notoriety was caused by what His disciples were doing. Even King Herod received a report about Jesus’ work and that of His followers. Yet there was confusion about who Jesus was and where He had come from. Since Herod had John beheaded, Herod would have paid particular attention to the rumor that Jesus was John the Baptist back from the dead.

When you examine that rumor, it was utterly foolish! How could Jesus be John, when they were cousins and contemporaries of one another? Jesus was doing the work He did before John was beheaded, so how could He now be John? There can certainly be a lot of superstition even among spiritual people. **Do you have any superstitious beliefs? Don’t answer too quickly.**

If you gave a special offering one time and God blessed you in some way right after that, you can easily think, “My offering brought that blessing, so the next time I have a need, I will give just like I did in that instance and God will bless me again.” God may, or He may not. That belief in the cause and effect of your gift, however, is in some ways a superstition. **Does this make sense? Do you agree or disagree?**

Day Four

¹⁵ Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" ¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife, whom he had married. ¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

v. 15 – Many people had an opinion of who Jesus was then and many still do today. It doesn't matter who anyone *thinks* Jesus is; it only matters who He truly is. You can hold an opinion about Jesus but that doesn't make it correct or infallible. You can also hold opinions about what Jesus will and won't do; those aren't infallible either.

Some believed that He was a prophet similar to those in Israel's past. At least those people were closer to the truth. While Jesus did not do a lot to help people understand who He was, we have a body of insight in the Bible that does tell us that He is the Son of God. Any other opinion of who Jesus is cannot be correct, although some opinions may be closer to the truth than others.

v. 16 – Herod was not a spiritual man. Plus he had the guilt of John's blood on his conscience, so Herod chose to believe that Jesus was John back from the dead. I would imagine that a man as perverse as Herod would have all kinds of strange spiritual beliefs. After all, this man was ruthless, plus an adulterer. Yet Herod was partly a Jew, and it is ironic that Jesus later paid Herod a visit right before His crucifixion, although He did not say a word at that time.

I will say this: At least Herod took credit for his nasty deed of executing John.

v. 17 – Like most kings, Herod was intoxicated with his own power. When John the Baptist preached that it was immoral for Herod to have his brother's wife, Herod had John imprisoned. They did not want to hear that they would be held accountable for breaking God's commandments, so they did the best they could to circumvent that Law. One of the things they did was kill John.

You must admire John the Baptist's courage for speaking out against the king. Many who speak out against the king, whether a real monarch, a bishop, chief executive officer in a company, priest or pastor are in danger. It's not good to rile the king, no matter what title the king may hold.

v. 18 – It is of note that John applied the principle of adultery to Herod, even though Herod was not a practicing Jew. In John's mind, God's moral laws were universal, and not just applicable to those who called on the name of the Lord. So there is not one standard of judgment for those who know the Lord and another for those who don't. This has important implications for those today who teach that there are many legitimate standards of morality or belief, and the most important thing is that the individual sincerely embrace those standards. While this sounds noble, it is misguided.

People can be wrong in their moral beliefs just like people were wrong in some of the opinions they held of who Jesus was (and is). It is important that we educate ourselves as to the right and wrong thinking where God's will and Jesus are concerned. Contrary to what some may say, what you believe is important. Contrary to what some may say, what you believe may be wrong.

Day Five

¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. ²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

v. 19 – Herodias “nursed” her grudge. She fed it, cared for it and kept it alive until an opportune moment. This woman was a witch, pure and simple. She was opposed to a godly man, just like Jezebel had been, and Herodias plotted to remove John for her own selfish reasons. She was a manipulative woman who used her power to have men do her bidding and she passed these traits on to her daughter through what she was about to do. How foolish! I can think of two verses in Proverbs that state:

The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down (Proverbs 14:1).

The memory of the righteous will be a blessing, but the name of the wicked will rot (Proverbs 10:7).

Herodias tried to preserve her house by power and greed, but instead tore it down. Consequently, the very thing she tried to avoid happened—she is remembered for all time as a wicked, worthless woman.

v. 20 – At first, Herod protected John as he should have done, since John was innocent. Herod listened to John but he didn’t understand what John was talking about. That is because the Herod lineage had so alienated themselves from God through murder and lawlessness that God had given them over to a hard heart, the heart that the Herods had chosen to have and maintain. Yet God in His mercy sent His finest Old Testament prophet to Herod to bear witness of the truth. This is the last chance Herod would have to repent, for, when Jesus came before him later in the gospel, He said not a word to this wicked king.

This is why we must be faithful to speak the truth, for we don’t know how long we have to live or how long the person to whom we are speaking has to live. **Do you have a sense of urgency in speaking the truth to those around you? If not, why not?**

Herod was puzzled when he heard John, yet he liked to listen to him. There are people who like to listen to spiritual truth, or at least listen to those who deliver such truth. They just don’t know what to do with what they hear! That should not discourage you and me, however, from declaring the truth.

v. 21 – Herod gave himself a birthday party. It is interesting that even then birthday celebrations were an important part of the culture. This ruthless man had to throw

himself a party, for no one would certainly do it for him. I'm sure he had great attendance at the party, for no one would dare miss it or forfeit their job—or their life!

Power can be used to build up or tear down. Herod used his to tear down and terrorize. **Do you have power in some setting? How are you using your power? Do you feel justified to use it any way you want because you are the “king”?** If so, then you are no different from Herod and Herodias.

Day Six

²² When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. The king said to the girl, "Ask me for anything you want, and I'll give it to you."

²³ And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom." ²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?" "The head of John the Baptist," she answered. ²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: "I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter."

vs. 22&23 – This young lady must have been quite a dancer! She brought the house down, so to speak. To show off for his guests, Herod decided to give the girl a gift on his birthday. How magnanimous of him! **Do you think he was trying to win the affections of his step-daughter, who was really his niece? Do you think Herod had a guilty conscience? Or perhaps he had his sights set on having this girl like he had her mother? At any rate, she now had the opportunity to receive a significant gift from one of the most important men in the kingdom. What would she request?**

Herod sealed his pledge with an oath so that no one would doubt the seriousness of his claim. I know this may sound strange but this is sort of how we stand before King Jesus, with a promise that He will grant what we ask. **What are you asking for in light of this tremendous promise? Are you maximizing your requests or, as we are about to see in the life of this girl, do you ask for something far beneath what could be yours?**

v. 24 – This is why I maintain that Herodias was a selfish witch. She could have used this situation to secure a significant gift for her daughter. Instead, Herodias used the open door to hatch a plot to rid her of this troublesome prophet. Herodias involved her daughter in this plot and the daughter was so morally bankrupt that she did not even raise a question as to the propriety of the request. This is the power a parent has for good or evil. Unfortunately, Herodias chose to train her daughter in manipulation and control instead of godly influence.

Are you using your God-given influence in the lives of your children to maximize their potential in God or to fulfill your own purpose? Are you living your life through your children or are they free to live their own life?

v. 25 – The daughter rushed back in to make her request, which was really her mother's petition. What a gruesome request! This young lady wanted to see a man's head presented to her on a platter. That was to be her reward for an outstanding performance.

Come to think of it, what kind of dance could she have done for these men that pleased them so? I doubt if it was a waltz or ballet. I think she was probably in various stages of disrobement! She was following in her mother's footsteps, using her femininity to manipulate and control.

Day Seven

²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. ²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. ²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

v. 26 – Herod was a moral coward. I have to believe that he could have said that this was an inappropriate request. He wanted to impress the crowd and keep the loyalty of his brother's wife and child, so he agreed to her request. The only thing worse than a dominant, ungodly woman is a weak man who is unwilling to oppose her.

vs. 27&28 – Herod issued the order and the executioner took off John's head and brought it to the girl, who passed it on to the mother. Wasn't this enough to make this girl sick? Obviously not, so the mother had already messed with this girl's mind and spirit so that a man's head being presented to her didn't seem to phase her. Or did it?

I can remember seeing some horror movies that gave me nightmares. What happened to this girl after this incident? I can only imagine that she was tortured with thoughts of murder, for that is what she had been partner to:

A man tormented by the guilt of murder will be a fugitive till death; let no one support him (Proverbs 28:17).

I cannot imagine a parent conspiring with a young daughter to commit murder, but that is what happened here. We will never know what affect this had on their lives, but we can be sure that it had a deep impact.

v. 29 – John had disciples and they came to bury their teacher. John knew that his end was near for he had fulfilled his purpose of proclaiming the day of the Lord:

To this John replied, "A man can receive only what is given him from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, 'I am not the Christ but am sent ahead of him.' The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. He must become greater; I must become less" (John 3:27-30).

John was unique, in that he willingly accepted his diminished role after he had been the main player early in this salvation drama. He died an unmemorable death, beheaded by a

tyrant in response to John's preaching. Yet he seemed to accept his role with grace and resolve, being as faithful in death as he was in life.

*Lord, may I have the spirit of John, who accepted his role, whether he was a celebrity one day or a martyr the next. **Do you think you can do the same?***