

## Lessons For The Journey From Mark 6

Turn to Mark 6 as we continue our study of this gospel. The author of this book, John Mark was most likely writing to Christians in Rome who were suffering persecution under the Emperor Nero. Mark wanted them to be encouraged, to see the faithfulness of God, to see that God answered prayer, but to also see that Christ's call often meant suffering and even death as believers battled against the forces of darkness in this world. He also wanted them to see that Christ can use people even when they don't have all the answers, even when their faith sometimes is weak or absent, even when they don't understand all of his ways and purposes.

I want to once again read a section of Mark 6 and then go back and make some observations concerning this passage of Scripture. Look with me **at Mark 6:6-30** and then we are going to point out some lessons for those of us on the journey of life as followers of Christ. (Read Mark 6:6b-30b).

Jesus was in the process of developing leaders out of the twelve. We've already talked about this progressive revelation that is occurring with them. Who is this that forgives sins and even the wind and waves obey him? This will culminate in Peter's declaration that Jesus is in fact the Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of God. But this is a learning process for them. They are disciples, learning as they follow Jesus. It's not about pouring facts and bible knowledge into their heads - that is the Western style of education - it is about being with Jesus and learning from him. Notice verse seven says Jesus called the twelve to himself. One of the other gospels says he called them to be with him and they learned as they lived life together.

Now Jesus is going to send them out, two by two, to announce the good news and call people to repent, to turn around and think a new way and live a new way. They have been called "disciples", followers and students, and now they are being called "apostles", which means sent ones. He is sending them on a journey, knowing that as they go they will have some success and some failure, but knowing through it all they will continue to learn and grow. As they are learning these lessons, we can learn a few things for our journey as well. Notice first,

**1. Inexperience is not a problem on the journey.** You don't have to have all the answers. It's interesting what the twelve didn't know. They didn't know yet that Jesus was truly the Messiah, the Son of God. They didn't know that he would die upon a cross to atone for their sins and the sins of the world. They didn't have an understanding of the faith, that centuries would pass in

what we call the church age. They didn't understand that he would rise from the dead and ascend to heaven and would promise to return to take them to heaven with him. They didn't understand the concept of the trinity, or of justification by faith or spiritual regeneration or sanctification. But they knew they had found one who could forgive sin and heal the sick and cast out devils and restore hope and bring meaning to life and Jesus sent these guys, with all their doubts and questions, with all they didn't yet know, he sent them out to share what they knew!

That's how he sends us as well. We don't have to have all the answers. Study and learn and keep on learning, but you don't have to have all the answers to share what you know with others. We've made what we've called witnessing, sharing your faith, something for which you have to be trained. You have to know all the answers to the questions you may be asked before you start talking to people about Jesus. These guys weren't trained, they were just sent on a mission to tell what they had seen and heard and experienced. That's all sharing your faith really is. Inexperience is not a problem. Just tell what you know about Jesus and what he's done for you.

**2. Learn to trust and travel light.** Jesus told them to take nothing for the journey except a walking stick. Wear sandals but don't even pack a bag, not even an extra shirt. No money, just go in faith. Why send them out with nothing? Because they were still in the process of learning to trust him. They needed to see once again that Jesus could supply all of their needs – that if they placed their full trust and confidence in him, he would provide. And they needed to learn to travel light. They needed to see there was nothing in this world to which they should attach themselves. All of the stuff, the material possessions, all of it would pass away with the using. Jesus wanted them to discover the importance and the value of depending upon him, of committing their ways to him for the journey of life.

It's a lesson we need to learn as Christ followers as well. We work so hard to acquire things believing that somehow we can find safety and security in what we have. The truth is our only hope, our only real safety and security is to be found in our relationship to Christ. He has promised to supply all of our needs according to his riches in glory. We could stand to learn that lesson, to learn to lean upon him and depend upon him, especially in the times we are living in.

At the last supper, according to Luke's gospel, Jesus asked them, **“When I sent you without purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything? ‘Nothing,’ they answered.”** Luke

**22:35.** They learned that lesson, that Jesus would supply all they needed in life if they would only submit to him and trust him. Interestingly, in Luke 22, Jesus tells them this time to get a coat and take a bag if they have one. They needed to learn the lesson of faith, but now that they have learned it, they can also learn the lessons of preparedness that goes with the changing seasons of life.

Let's trust Jesus and travel light. Fall deeper in love with Jesus every day. **Hold tightly to Jesus and hold loosely to everything else.** Understand that by traveling light, they could remain focused on the mission and wouldn't have to be preoccupied with all these possessions and other distractions. Traveling is so much easier if you don't have to carry a bunch of stuff to keep up with. Understand, we are on a journey, just passing through here. Don't allow yourself to be distracted by "stuff". Stay focused on the mission, the purpose of the journey and remember, this isn't home. Home awaits us so travel light and trust the Lord and it will make the journey much more enjoyable and profitable.

**3. It's best to journey together.** Notice Jesus sent them out in twos. There is safety in numbers. It helps to have someone to hold you accountable, to encourage you, to pray for you, to help you up if you stumble and fall. That's why he has placed us in his church, the body of Christ, so we could do life together and journey together. You may have read recently of a famous author who said she was through with Christianity. Not Jesus, she still loved him, she just wasn't going to have anything to do with his church, his people. I hope she inquires of Jesus to find out what he thinks about that. He doesn't send us on the journey alone because he knows we need each other. Fallen, messed up, imperfect, yet redeemed, he sends us on this journey together. Don't try it on your own. Avail yourself of opportunities to meet others and to fellowship and grow in Christ together.

**4. Learn to be content.** Wherever you are on the journey, learn to be content. Jesus told them to enter whatever house would receive them and to stay there until they left town. He wanted them to learn to be grateful for what was given to them and to avoid being status climbers. How would it look if they were invited into one home and then someone with a nicer house and more possessions invited them to come and stay with them? It's not about possessions it's about relationships and the mission, the journey we are on with Christ and for his kingdom. The apostle Paul said, **"I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation,**

**whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:12-13.** Paul told Timothy that **“...godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that.” 1 Timothy 6:6-8.**

Don't be status climbers, instead, learn to be content where Jesus has placed you. Discover the value of the friends around you, find the joy that is to be experienced where you are, look for the purposes of God to be carried out in the circumstances in which God has placed you. **5. Learn how to walk away.** Long before Kenny Rogers sang about learning when to hold em or fold em, when to walk away and when to run, Jesus told his disciples to learn when to walk away. He wanted them to realize you won't win every battle. Jesus explained to the twelve that not everyone would receive them. Not everyone will be open to your message or your ministry, as evidenced by what happened to Jesus in his hometown of Nazareth in the opening verses of chapter 6.

Some folks don't want your help. They don't want your testimony, your prayers, your faith, your encouragement, your sunny disposition, your optimism. They don't even want to be healed. As difficult as it may be, sometimes you just have to walk away. There will be another day, another season, another opportunity. Do your best, be faithful and then walk away.

Jesus told them to shake the dust off of their feet anyplace where people refused to welcome them or to listen to their message. It meant to treat them as pagan territory. A true follower wouldn't want even dust from an unclean place to follow them into the temple, and Jesus uses that thought to show them to shake off the dust and go on to the next place.

We have to learn how to move on sometimes. Not everyone will hear or receive. Some things have to be left behind, as sad and as difficult as that sounds. You won't win every battle.

And to further illustrate that, Mark does an interesting thing. In the middle of telling this story of the twelve being sent out, he tells the story of John the Baptist's imprisonment and execution at the hands of Herod Antipas. Notice the jump from verse 13 to verse 30.

As I read about Herod and his wickedness, it would make for a Royal family edition of the Jerry Springer show. You talk about dysfunctional. I had to try to chart this to keep track of everyone. It's kind of like George Foreman naming all of his children George. Herod the Great

was the King who ordered the killing of all the babies around Bethlehem at the birth of Christ. Herod was the royal name so everyone was named Herod. He was one cruel person. He didn't just order the killing of babies, he also ordered the killing of at least one wife, three of his sons, his mother in law, his brother in law and a few others. It was Caesar Augustus who said, "I would rather be Herod's pig than his son!" When he died, he divided his kingdom among three of his four surviving sons. These sons were half-brothers since Herod the Great had numerous wives. Herod Archelaus became King of Judea in southern Israel. Herod Antipas became the ruler of Galilee in northern Israel and what is now Jordan, but with the title of tetrarch rather than king. Mark calls him King Herod, but possibly only to mock him because it was apparently a sore spot with him and his status climbing wife. Herod Philip ruled as tetrarch over what is now Syria.

You've got these three sons of Herod the Great and then you've got a granddaughter of Herod the Great named Herodias. She was the daughter of another son, Aristobulus. He was the son of Herod the Great by his wife Mariamne and Herod the Great had both his son Aristobulus killed, along with his mother, Mariamne. Herodias was also the sister to Herod Agrippa I, the guy who had James killed in Jerusalem in Acts 12 and also had Peter arrested with the intention of killing him also. So, Aristobulus and Herod Philip and Herod Antipas were all half brothers and Herodias was Aristobulus's daughter so that means she was the niece of Philip and Antipas. Are you following me? Of course not, but what you need to know is that Herod Philip married his niece Herodias and they had a daughter they named Salome. But then Herodias left Philip and married his brother, Herod Antipas. Which means that Herodias was Herod Antipas' sister in law and his niece before she became his wife. No wonder John the Baptist thought this was a bad deal. Jewish law prohibited a man from marrying his brother's wife if the brother was still living. Of course the fact that she was a niece didn't help things in terms of the incestuous relationship.

John renounced the marriage and was thrown in prison for it. It was Salome, Herodias's daughter by her marriage to Philip that enticed Herod Antipas to offer her anything she wanted. We don't know how old Salome was, possibly a young teenager and here is Herod Antipas, lusting after Salome who was his grand niece, his niece and his step-daughter all at the same time. This is what giving in to lust and sin will lead to.

Herod didn't want to kill John. Although he refused to believe his teaching, he was fascinated by it and held John in high respect. He considered him a holy man. Notice verse 20 says he was greatly puzzled by John and yet he liked to listen to him.

Herod was not only a cruel and wicked man, he seems to be a coward as well. Rather than risk embarrassment before his birthday guests or a confrontation with his wife, he orders the execution of John the Baptist, whereby we end with John's head on a platter and his disciples coming to bury the body. And here comes an important lesson for the journey for the disciples and for all of us. Here is why Mark inserts this story.

**6. Journeying with Jesus doesn't exempt you from evil.** There are evil people and evil governments and evil systems and evil events. Being a Christian doesn't mean we won't run into evil, in fact, the truth is being a Christ follower puts something of a target on our back in terms of the enemy of our soul. The devil wants nothing more than to destroy us and discourage us if he can.

Mark wanted the believers to realize that regardless of the circumstances, you must keep on trusting and believing. Things didn't turn out as expected, yet God was still at work. Luke's gospel tells us that John sent two of his disciples to ask Jesus, "are you the one or should we expect another?" Perhaps John was expecting deliverance and when it didn't come, he began to wonder. Some of us begin to wonder when things don't turn out as expected. "I thought Jesus was going to rescue me and my family. Why am I going through this?" It didn't turn out as John's disciples expected, but God was yet at work.

Mark's readers in Rome were facing death at the hands of another wicked Emperor, Nero. Perhaps they were wondering why their prayers for deliverance weren't being answered? Why were they dying at the hands of an evil King? Mark let them know what was happening to them wasn't unique to them so don't quit, don't give up. Keep serving the Lord.

Understand, following Christ can be hazardous to your health and wealth. I know what has been preached to our generation, but I know what Scripture says. God will be faithful, Jesus will never leave us or forsake us, but that doesn't change the fact that John the Baptist was executed as were all but one of the disciples. They sacrificed all for the sake of the gospel and Jesus is still calling us to come to him and then sending us out into a wicked and evil world to spread the gospel. And there are still battles to be fought and there are still casualties of war. So

let me add this final point,

**7. Learn to trust while living with the mystery.** I know what I know. I am certain that in Christ we find the answers to the meaning and purpose of life. I know that he is savior and Lord. I know God is faithful and he is working in us and through us. But there are some things I don't know. Nope, I can't explain why John had to be executed, or why Herod Agrippa had James executed. Or why the disciples came back telling of the people that had been delivered and healed and at the same time John was being executed. Why does God heal some and not others? I don't know, so I learn to keep on trusting and believing and I learn to live with the mystery.

Deuteronomy 29:29 says **“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever...” Deuteronomy 29:29.** Whether you like it or not, you'll have to learn to live with some mystery on this journey with Jesus. You'll have to learn to keep on trusting him even in the shadowlands, even in the difficult and hard places. Struggles and tragedy occur because there is evil in this world and we are living in a fallen and sinful environment. Evil will occur to God's people because there are Herods in this world. And some things will just be kept close to God's heart, things that are known only to him – the mystery, the secret things. But the things revealed, the things that we know for sure about salvation and life and hope and eternity and his love for us - they belong to us and to our children forever and nothing can separate us from those things and from his love.

John died, but the gospel spread to the palace of Herod and throughout the region. Something was happening on this wicked planet. By the end of this chapter Mark tells us wherever they went people were bringing the sick to Jesus and all were being healed.

Mark wants us to know there will be all kinds of twists and turns on the journey. There will be great victories and there will be setbacks and what appears to be defeat. There will be healing and deliverance and great miracles and there will be funerals and divorces and accidents that defy explanation. And in the middle of it, just like in Mark 6, we will see Jesus, faithful, caring, providing, telling us what he told the disciples in verse 50, in the midst of another storm, **“Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.”**

Where ever you are on your journey, don't be afraid. Maybe you are at that place where you are seeing miracles, like the disciples were. Demons are being defeated, the sick are being healed and blessing seems to be everywhere. Or maybe you are like John and his disciples, wondering why the answer they hoped for didn't come. Regardless, keep believing, keep learning the lessons of the journey, keep trusting, and keep listening to Jesus. “Take courage.

I'm here. Don't be afraid."

We are on a journey home. Don't quit. Don't be afraid. Keep trusting, keep learning and keep journeying on with Jesus. We will soon be home.