

The Gospel of Mark – Too close to home.

Mark 6:1-29

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



I can be a very skeptical person. For some of you hearing this, you are not surprised. Others, perhaps because I am a pastor and there is this perception that pastors are optimists, or at least they are to be optimists, this comes as a surprise to you. As a skeptical person, I am a firm believer in the phrase, “If it seems too good to be true, it is too good to be true.” So, whenever I see an “As Seen ON TV” product claiming to be the end-all-be-all tool for your life, I hardly buy-in. Or, really, anything that promises over-the-top results, performance, or satisfaction, I really tend to doubt. Years ago, though, I ended up buying a product that I severely doubted and misjudged but came to really love. It was a mattress. Yep, you heard that right. A mattress. See, Danielle and I had just come back from a trip to PA, where we slept on air mattresses all week, and I then realized how bad our mattress actually was. After listening to podcasts in the car and hearing this one ad for a new internet-based mattress company for the 30 hours of driving, I was convinced it was time to buy a new mattress. But, order one via the internet from a start-up company?!? Surely, this was too good to be true! My skepticism and frugality battled as I did some research, and it was the 100-night refund guarantee that tipped my frugality to the winning side. And, you know what? That mattress was one of the best purchases I ever made. My skepticism almost made me miss something of great value. That very idea of missing something of great value is the point Mark raises in this next section of his Gospel. We are again going to see people miss Jesus, and it is tragic. But, if we are willing to lean in, we will see that we’re not all that different from them. Yes, our culture and context are different, but our heart’s desires aren’t. And just like them, **we can miss Jesus for a variety of reasons.**

1. Doubt in Nazareth (vv. 1-6)

- a. The Markan Sandwich.
 - i. **Contrasting images help bring clarity.**
 - 1. Unfaithful (vv.1-6) - Faithful (vv. 7-13) - Unfaithful (vv.14-29)
 - ii. **The contrast between the stories of faith in Mark 5 and the story of unbelief that begins Mark 6 could not be more different or more tragic. 6:1–6** tells the story of how

the most famous alumnus of Nazareth was welcomed—or rather, not welcomed—home.¹

1. The contrasts are drawn out even further for us when we examine the end of chapter 4, chapter 5, and the first section of chapter 6.
 - a. We saw Jesus demonstrate his absolute authority in the previous section. He is Lord over creation (4:35-41), Lord over dark spiritual forces (5:1-20), and Lord over sickness and death (5:21-43).
 - b. All of this happens and then when Jesus comes back to his hometown, they reject him! The contrasts Mark has provided us should make the tragedy of that stand out in brilliantly for us.
- b. **They rejected Jesus because of familiarity.**
 - i. **Jesus leaves the Sea of Galilee and travels 25 miles southwest to his hometown of Nazareth.** He goes to the synagogue and begins to teach. In Luke's Gospel, when Jesus teaches at the synagogue in Nazareth, he turns to a text in Isaiah 61 about the coming of the Messiah. He says, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). We don't know whether this was the same occasion as that in Mark 6 or a different one but, either way, the inhabitants of Nazareth would have heard Jesus' claim to be the Messiah.²
 - ii. **I love the way that N.T. Wright describes this situation.** "Most preachers can remember the first time they stood up to preach in front of their own parents. It's not the same as with other things people do. If you're a musician, they probably heard you practicing when you were little; if you're a footballer, they saw you playing in the garden. But preaching is something dangerously public that emerges from something intensely private. Parents, and others who have known you when you were growing up, are inclined to be embarrassed both at the revelation of something so deeply personal and at its being waved around in front of the neighbors. **Everybody is vulnerable at a moment like that.** → Multiply that up a bit to allow for the fact that Jesus' message was different. **He wasn't just another synagogue preacher, telling people how to obey God's law, offering God's hope for the future, explaining from the prophets something about when the kingdom might come. He was saying, apparently on his own authority, that the kingdom was coming, then and there.** Where he was, the kingdom was. And if there was any doubt on the matter, he was doing things that demonstrated it."³
- c. **"And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief"** - Matthew 13:58.
 - i. This is how Matthew helps us to understand what is going on here. It isn't that Jesus isn't powerful or couldn't perform miracles. It is that they were so hard hearted that they literally refused to believe.
 1. This is the same situation Pharaoh found himself in with Moses. (Ex.7:13-14)
 2. It is also what Paul talks about in Rom. 1:24,26,28, when he writes "God gave them up to their desires."
 - a. These are pictures of what happens to our hearts when we refuse to believe.

¹ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 94.

² Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 94.

³ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 65–66.

- ii. “The people of Nazareth already knew of Jesus’ miracles (Mark 6:2) but refused to believe. Their cynicism prevented most from bringing their sick to him for healing. Only a handful did so, and he healed them. **Doubt has trouble believing; unbelief obstinately refuses to believe.**”⁴
 - 1. “Amazed at their lack of faith.” **What amazes God about humanity is not its sinfulness and propensity for evil but its hardness of heart and unwillingness to believe in him.**⁵
 - 2. God is no disrespector of wills, if you do not want to see him correctly, he will not force you.
- d. **They were repelled by him → Stumbling block. (v.3)**
 - i. “And they took offense at him,” says Mark. The word for “offense” comes from Gk. *skandalon*, meaning a “**stumbling block**.” The verb (Gk. *skandalizein*) means to “cause to stumble,” and in the present context to be “put off” or even “repelled” by Jesus. *Skandalizein* occurs eight times in the Gospel of Mark; in each instance it designates obstructions that prevent one from coming to faith and following Jesus. A stumbling block to faith, a signature motif in Mark, is a grave problem. The “offense” of v. 3 verifies that the amazement of the people in Nazareth is not one of faith but of incredulity and opposition.⁶
 - ii. **What about Jesus is a stumbling block for me? / What is off-putting?**
 - 1. This is a question that we might chide at initially. One that hits us and we dismiss it as good Christians that there is nothing about Jesus that we find off-putting. But, we need to step back and maybe ask another question, **“Am I being formed into the image of Jesus or is he being formed into my image?”**
 - 2. His family of origin was a stumbling block for them.
 - a. Honestly, his family of origin was a stumbling block for his family! James did not believe until after the resurrection.
 - 3. There are things about Jesus that rub us the wrong way. When we bump against those things, we tend to say, “Jesus didn’t mean that.” or “Jesus surely would have... insert whatever perspective we have.”
 - a. **Consider – “No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.” – Luke 13:5**
 - b. **Consider – “So the last will be first, and the first last.” – Matt. 20:16**
 - c. **Consider – “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. ²⁶It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, ²⁷and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, ²⁸even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” – Matt. 20:25-28**
 - d. **Consider – “And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” – Matt 7:23**

⁴ David Garland, *The Gospel of Mark*, (p 238) via Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God’s Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 95.

⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 174.

⁶ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 173.

iii. Rewind – Truth and Compassion Lenses

1. The reality of formation is that we are being formed. Sounds overly simple, huh? Formation is an active process. Too often in the church we settle for information and we do not allow the perspectives of Jesus to challenge us.
 - a. **Caution** – This is not that all believers are going to have a monolithic perspective on all issues.
 - b. We need to be challenged in order to grow. → Jesus challenges the disciples all the time!
2. Often for us when we are confronted by the truth or the compassion of Jesus we tend to drift one way or the other. That is, of these two lenses, we see through one primarily. It is good for us to identify that and then sit with the tension of when Jesus' actions and words "rub us the wrong way." → Maybe it is the Holy Spirit working on us and helping us to be formed into the image of Jesus.

2. Faithful in the face of adversity. (vv. 7-13)

a. Jesus sends out the twelve.

- i. The mission of the Twelve is the defining theme of 6:6b–30. This is signified by another Markan sandwich, in which the martyrdom of John the Baptizer (6:14–29) is placed between the sending (6:6b–13) and return (6:30) of the Twelve. **John the Baptizer was last mentioned at 1:14, when Mark announced the commencement of Jesus' public ministry in conjunction with John's arrest.** Mark has yet to report on John's fate at the hands of Herod Antipas. The fact that Mark inserts the execution of the Baptizer in the context of the sending and return of the Twelve on their first mission journey forces readers to consider what John's death means for discipleship and mission with Jesus.⁷
 1. **Remember** – We are in the final year of Jesus' life and he is intentionally preparing the disciples for life after the cross. That is, he is preparing them to go and carry the gospel message to all people (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth – Acts 1:8).
- ii. **The four items required of the Twelve are, in fact, identical to the belongings that God instructs the Israelites to take on their flight from Egypt: cloak, belt, sandals, and staff in hand (Exod 12:11).** The parallel in dress, in other words, is identical with the Exodus apparel but only loosely similar to Cynic dress. These four items of clothing recall the haste and expectation of the Exodus. **They suggest that the mission of the Twelve announces something as foundational and revelatory as the Exodus from Egypt,** and that the disciples must be as free from encumbrances as were the Israelites, to serve their God in a new venture.⁸

b. This was not going to be easy. (cf. Matt. 10:16)

- i. ¹⁶ **"Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves."**

⁷ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 176–177.

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 180.

1. **Matthew helps us to understand a little more of Jesus' instructions to them. This wasn't going to be easy, no discipleship will cost them. Their audiences will not always be receptive and they will not always be welcomed.**
- ii. The Twelve are not sent to do a new work but to continue and extend the work begun by Jesus (1:34; 3:11–12; 5:8). That even includes the places in which they minister, for they are not sent to urban centers like Tiberias or Sepphoris but to the “villages” (Gk. *komē*) where Jesus has been. The accent falls not on innovation but on the full representation of the one who commissioned them. Jesus bestows authority on believers so that they may participate in and further *his* ministry.⁹
- c. **Don't miss Jesus' authority in this section.**
 - i. **One of the great themes of this Gospel is Jesus' authority.** The first few chapters give prominence to the conflict between heavenly authority and all other authorities. The authorities and rulers of the demonic realm are no match for heaven's champion as he comes and routs the demons—even a legion of them. We see a different picture when it comes to human authority. Human authorities are blind to the identity of Jesus. His family rejects him as crazy, the scribes reject him as demon-possessed, and his hometown takes great offense to him.¹⁰
 - ii. **Mark forces us to see the centrality of Jesus' authority.**
 1. Jesus sends them.
 2. They follow Jesus' instructions.
 3. They operate under Jesus' authority.
 - iii. They are to trust Jesus.
 1. **The barest of essentials, however, ensures that they place their trust not in their supplies and training but rather than in the one who sends them.** It would be like laying out on your bed everything you planned to take on a trip and then leaving everything but your coat and toothbrush behind. **True service of Jesus is characterized by dependence on Jesus**, and dependence on Jesus is signified by going where Jesus sends despite material shortfalls and unanswered questions.¹¹
- d. **They declared the need of repentance.** → This was their primary message. Why? Because it was Jesus' primary message. → They obeyed, were faithful in the face of adversity, and they saw God move. Why is repentance such an important message?
 - i. **Repentance is an act of worship.**
 1. Worship is to ascribe right praise to God for who he is. The act of repenting acknowledges God's rightful character and praises him for that.
 - ii. **Repentance acknowledges Jesus' authority.**
 1. Repentance is a turning from the path of self and onto the path of Jesus. Turning to the path of Jesus only makes sense if the way of Jesus is a better way. That is, if Jesus has the authority to offer us something better than we can offer ourselves.
 - iii. **Repentance is to be a regular thing.**

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 179.

¹⁰ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 96.

¹¹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 181.

1. Saving faith is the first act of repentance. However that doesn't mean that is the only time we are to repent. Repentance is to be a regular thing for all Christians. And when I repent, I am not just asking for forgiveness so that I can go on my way in my sin. I am acknowledging the way I was going was wrong and earnestly work to walk in righteousness instead. **Maybe we should ask, do I practice repentance as a discipline or do I just ask for forgiveness?**

3. Conflicted motives. (vv. 14-29)

- a. We now arrive at the third part of the Markan sandwich in this section, Herod. → Specifically, Mark gives us a flashback to Herod murdering John the Baptist. Remember, John was arrested close to the beginning of Jesus' early ministry. Likely around 9-12 months into Jesus' public ministry. → Let's review, who is Herod Antipas?
 - i. **Antipas is less infamous than Herod the Great largely because he was less able rather than less ruthless.** It was not without reason that the early church mentioned Antipas's name *before* Pilate's when recalling the crucifixion of Jesus (Acts 4:27). Like his father, Antipas was shrewd, pitiless, and a lover of luxury, particularly of magnificent architecture. He built two cities in Galilee, Tiberias and Sepphoris. Jesus' reference to Antipas as "that fox" (Luke 13:32) bears eloquent testimony to the latter's cunning and malice. Antipas revealed his avarice when he persuaded Herodias, wife of his half-brother Herod Philip, son of Herod the Great's third wife Mariamne II (not the tetrarch Philip of Luke 3:1), to divorce her husband and marry him. In order to marry Herodias, however, Antipas had to jilt his own wife, the daughter of Aretas, king of Nabatea east of the Dead Sea. In reprisal, Aretas inflicted a crushing defeat on Antipas in A.D. 36. Three years later Antipas and Herodias were banished to Gaul by the emperor Caligula.¹²
 - ii. Cruel and a lover of luxuries. (v.22)
 1. "Ask whatever you wish..." Herod had no lack of earthly wealth.
 - iii. Jesus calls Herod "that fox..." (Lk. 13:32)
 1. ³¹ **At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you."** ³² **And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course.'**
 - iv. Deeply conflicted and compromised. (v. 20)
 1. **"And Herodias had a grudge against him and wanted to put him to death. But she could not, ²⁰ for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly."**
- b. **Righteousness is rejected because of disordered desires.**
 - i. Herod rejected the message of righteousness that he heard from John and wanted to put Jesus to death because of his disordered desires.
 - ii. **How do we do this today? → "Did God really mean?"**

¹² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 184.

1. Often, we don't want the righteousness of Jesus to reign over our disordered desires (just like Herod), and so we find loopholes and ways around it all. We ask questions like, "Did God really say?" or "Did God really mean?"
2. What are the disordered desires in my life that I have made "room for?"
- c. Application – Repentance as worship. → Let's look back at this. (Repent & Believe – cf. 1:15)
 - i. **Believe - A change of mind.**
 - ii. Ok, so Jesus uses the word, repent, first, so why are we taking believe first? → Because in our Western perspective we logically begin with thinking (the mind) first. We understand that the essence of personhood is the ability to think. With that, we separate thinking and action into two different categories. In the original context, these two ideas were linked together and couldn't be separated. I.e., Two sides of the same coin.
 - iii. **See Jesus clearly.** → This is one part of Mark's core purpose or central goal for the readers of his Gospel.
 1. When we come to see Jesus clearly, there is a distinct change of mind that happens not just in relationship to his person and character, but to the implications of his person and character. → I.e., If he truly is who he says he is... then I need to take him and his teachings seriously.
 - b. **Repent - A change of action (heart).**
 - i. Follow him accordingly. → This is the second core purpose or goal for the readers of his Gospel.
 1. This is literally going in the opposite direction I was before. In the context of the Gospel, I was going in the way of self, then I came to see Jesus clearly, so I repent and go in the way of Jesus.
 - ii. Coupled with the command to repent is the command to "believe." If repentance denotes that which one turns *from*, belief denotes that which one turns *to*—the gospel. Both verbs in Greek are present imperatives, that is, they enjoin living in a condition of repentance and belief as opposed to momentary acts. **Repentance and belief cannot be applied to certain areas of life but not to others; rather, they lay claim to the total allegiance of believers.** ¹³
 - c. **The words repent and believe leave us needing to consider two questions.** → When we are presented with an opportunity to see Jesus clearly, it is also an opportunity to examine other areas of our lives.
 - i. **What have I, or am I, truly putting my trust in for my security?**
 1. That's why it goes with the call to believe. Jesus' contemporaries trusted all sorts of things: their ancestry, their land, their Temple, their laws. ¹⁴
 2. In other words, what do I look to in order to feel, ok?
 - a. Finances, relationships, work, food, entertainment, possessions, approval of others, health, etc.
 - b. None of these things are bad in-and-of themselves. But, what happens to me if I lose one of those things, or what I thought would bring me contentment, never is achieved? → I.e., "I never thought life would be like this."

¹³ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 47.

¹⁴ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 9–10.

- ii. What we see in this passages is that like the first disciples, Jesus offers us a different vision for life.
- d. **What is it that I am actively allowing to renew and shape my mind?**
 - i. When it comes to the process of repentance and belief, it involves a renewing of our minds. So, not only does Jesus offer us a different vision for life, he transforms us from the inside out and into the vision.
 - ii. In this age of information and ideas, what are we leaning into? Does it conform with the picture of Jesus in the NT?
 - iii. **Repentance is easier said than done.** How can we possibly change the core of who we are? How can such a deep work happen? Can we just decide to repent and believe? Repentance and faith happen within us, but they do not originate from us. The Bible says that both repentance (2 Timothy 2:25) and faith (Ephesians 2:8–9) are gifts that God must grant.¹⁵ → **When we regularly practice the discipline of repentance, we do not grow comfortable with the desires of this age, and with that, we resist missing Jesus.**

¹⁵ Jason Meyer, *Mark for You*, ed. Carl Laferton, God's Word for You (The Good Book Company, 2022), 30.