

The Gospel of Mark – More ministry around Galilee.

Mark 6:30-56

(Expanded Sermon Notes)



Thomas Merton was a Trappist monk, writer, and spiritual thinker who was a significant figure in 20th-century Catholicism and broader spiritual discourse. Merton's journey led him to embrace the contemplative life within the walls of the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky. In his book, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (which is a collection of his thoughts and brief reflections), he shares a comical picture of life in the Abbey. One brother, who is at his wit's end, has been talked down from leaving by another brother. After this de-escalating conversation, the brother, who had previously been at wit's end, found himself in the library of the Abbey reading a book titled *Relax and Just Live*. Then, Merton concludes this story by offering the reflection, "Doesn't it always come to that?"¹

Merton's reflection is a poignant one for you and me. Much of our lives are spent in busyness. In fact, busyness is one of the virtues of life in the West. We measure our lives not on the intentionality of what we are about or engaged in but on the busyness of what we're doing. We use phrases that talk about being committed to the hustle or grind. We think that if we plan well, chart well, and optimize every aspect of our days, we can efficiently wring out every drop of efficiency from our days. We often look at those around us who are not as busy or efficient as lazy. And in that, we make a moral judgment on them. When in reality, it isn't that they are actually lazy, where they are neglectful of things to their harm. But that they don't share the same "motivation" that we have. But, when all of that hustle and grind culture begins to crack, fall apart, or cause damage to our lives, what do we reflect? I need to just "relax and live."

We declare this idea to "relax and live" as if it is groundbreaking or revolutionary. But, what we fail to see is that it is not revolutionary or innovative at all. It is, instead, foundational and essential. It is how we were supposed to live the whole time. But, like so many gifts God has given us, we have twisted them into some grotesque version of their original beauty. Merton's reflection corrects us from faulty thinking. It reaches us a lasting truth of the Scriptures that **doing and being are not the same thing.**

¹ Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*

1. Rest – A gift from God. (v. 31)

- a. **Context** – v. 30 picks up with the disciples coming back from their ministry tour. And what are the results? They have seen God do amazing things. But it has been intense, and Jesus takes them away to rest.
 - i. There is a delightful naivety in the account of the apostles' reporting to Jesus, not only what they have done but also what they have said.²
 - ii. There had been a similar preaching tour in Galilee before (1:39), but that had been undertaken in the company of Jesus; this was the first time that the twelve had gone out alone, relying solely upon his word.³
 - iii. The first prerequisite of discipleship is being with Jesus (3:14). The life of the disciple is not only mission for Jesus but also mission with Jesus. The enlisting of the disciples' services cannot usurp or eclipse their fellowship with Jesus. This latter truth is signified by Jesus' call to " 'Come away with me by yourselves.' " The priority of Jesus' relationship with the Twelve is signified by the repetition in vv. 31–32 of two Greek phrases, *kat' idian* (NIV, "by yourselves/by themselves"), and *eis erēmon topon* (NIV, "a quiet place"/"a solitary place"). The latter phrase means a deserted or lonely place away from towns and villages. **The gathering of the disciples to Jesus means that in the midst of business and busyness, they are accountable to him alone. And the greater the demands on them, the greater their need to be alone with Jesus.**⁴
- b. **A consistent challenge – Doing vs. Being?**
 - i. **Which is my identity sourced in?**
 - 1. What is the question we ask kindergartners? → What do you want to be when you grow up?
 - 2. What is the question we ask when we meet someone? → What do you do?
 - ii. **These questions get at the "perceived" reality that what I do is the sum of who I am. I.e., That doing and being are the same thing.**
 - 1. But, Jesus gives us another picture. And, one that is far more beautiful and leads to our flourishing. Jesus teaches that being comes before doing, and our doing flows out of our being not the other way around. → **Again, the greater the demand of ministry, the greater the need to be with him.**
 - 2. **Why does this matter? (Received vs achieved identity)**
 - a. If what I do determines who I am, then I am only as good or as bad as what I've last done, and specifically in comparison to those who have done better or worse than myself. That is actually quite a hollow and defeating way to look at the world around me and myself.
 - b. If my being comes first, then I am in need of something bigger than myself (that is something I esteem) to define me (that is to esteem me). When I am esteemed by something I esteem, then I am that not by my actions but instead by their word.

² R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 178.

³ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 178.

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 190.

- i. **Consider this in parenting.** → Do we love our children when they are disobedient? Yes. We do not love the disobedience, but we do not stop loving the child. I.e., We do not love our children merely because of what they have produced. We love them because of who they are, and they are part of us.
 - c. **So the question is, why do we have a different expectation of our Heavenly Father who is good and unchanging?**
 - d. **A follow up is, how does God's gift of rest help reorient our perception of doing and being?**
- c. **Rest helps us resist the notion that our value comes from what we produce.**
 - i. In Sabbath, we literally produce nothing and God still delights in us.
 - 1. What other experience in our lives is like that?
 - 2. What do we communicate to God when we do not value rest in the way that he does? → We are saying that what we produce is the source of our value.
- d. Rest does help us recharge for what's ahead.
 - i. However, rest is not a means to an end. I.e., We are not to make our rest another thing to do.
 - ii. A week away will never make up for living at an unsustainable pace.
- e. Rest reorients us away from an unhealthy sense of doing.
 - i. Again, in Matthew 7, Jesus refers to the fact that there will be people who will proclaim their good works for Jesus, yet they will be turned away because they did not know him. That is, they did not fully trust him for their salvation.
 - ii. We live in a culture that constantly tells us to produce more, and the way of Jesus offers us a different path. One where we are not crushed by the weight of our doing.
 - 1. ²⁸ **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.**
²⁹ **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** ³⁰ **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."** ⁵

2. Resources – For God's glory. (vv. 37-38)

- a. **Context:** The disciples and Jesus get to the remote area and the crowds had beat them there.
 - i. The small size of the Sea of Galilee made it quite possible for the crowds, traveling along the shore to outdistance the little ship, which probably had no favorable wind.⁶
 - ii. Jesus then sets out to serve the crowds via teaching and the first bread miracle.
 - 1. The objections raised by the disciples were all very reasonable. It was indeed *late*, and the place was in truth *lonely*. If bread must be given to the crowds, it would have to be brought in from a distance; and it certainly would have cost, at the most conservative estimate, two hundred denarii to feed them all. **Their calculations were therefore quite correct; but they had omitted from their calculations Jesus, the incalculable factor.** ⁷
 - iii. We cannot forget the larger context.

⁵ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Mt 11:28–30.

⁶ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 178.

⁷ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 179.

1. The ministry tour has just ended and they saw God, provide!
 2. The point of this ministry tour was not what they would do, but it is what they would learn. If God provided for them then, why could he not provide for them and the crowds now!?
 - a. Mark cues us in to what was going on. → Their hearts were hardened. (vv. 51-52)
 - b. The Bible talks about hardheartedness in two ways, a risk and a permanent thing.
 - i. The disciples due to exhaustion and frustration, have hard hearts towards the crowds. Jesus has compassion. The disciples are at risk of letting their hearts grow hard towards indifference.
 - ii. Pharaoh and in Romans 1 we see that God talks about hearts that are permanently hard. This is the difference between doubt and unbelief.
- b. John's account gives us more of the drama that is going on here. (Jn. 6:4-13)**
- i. Jesus was "testing" Phillip → Remember where Phillip just came from.
 1. Jesus is preparing the disciples for after the cross.
 - ii. They needed 8-months wages to buy food... if they could even get any.
 1. Late in the day – Too far to go (a remote place)
- c. Provision - Who will they trust? → Themselves or God?**
- i. They don't get it right here. → Faithful one moment and unfaithful the next.
 - ii. Instead, we see the faithfulness of a boy (cf. Jn. 6) to offer his resources up to Jesus. And what does Jesus do? Only what God can do, take the insufficient and make it sufficient.
 1. Jesus sees possibilities where his disciples see only impossibilities, for God can multiply even the smallest gifts if they are made available to him.⁸
 - iii. In typical Markan brevity and understatement, we are told, "They all ate and were satisfied." The word "all" is significant. Nowhere did the Torah and the oral tradition regulate Jewish life more than at table. The effect of kosher was to ensure that only proper foods that were properly prepared were eaten by the properly clean; unclean foods and unclean persons were necessarily excluded. At the wilderness banquet, however, the ritual hierarchy of kosher is abandoned in favor of an open invitation and inclusiveness of all people. "They *all* ate and were satisfied." The meal provided by Jesus does not tide them over until something more substantial can be had. The bread of Jesus *satisfies* because it is an expression of his compassion, and it is given in such measure that there is a basket of leftovers for each of the disciples.⁹
- d. Two questions to consider with our resources:**
- i. What resources do I have in my life?
 1. Consider – Time, Talents, Treasure
 - ii. Are they available for God's glory?
 1. Have I decided that they are not "enough" for God?
 2. Have I decided what is the "best" use of them?
 3. Or, have I decided to be faithful with them in the season I am in?

⁸ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 192.

⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 193.

3. Presence – Resisting a hard heart. (vv. 51-52)

- a. Context – Green grass → Spring Time → Passover
 - i. A few notes so we get the detail right before being swept away by the main event. The grass is green; if you've been to Galilee, you will know that this means the story is set in the springtime. Grass grows quickly in spring, but once the rains stop in May it gets scorched with the fierce sun. This takes place, then, around Passover time. Mark will have been aware of this, and of the way in which the words he uses to describe what Jesus did with the bread fit so neatly into the pattern the early church came to use for its own regular bread-breaking new-Passover meal: he took, blessed, broke and gave it.¹⁰
 - ii. **The Passover is the height of Jewish festivals. And in its very essence is a reminder that God desires to be with his people.**
 - iii. **Mark's goal is for his reader to see Jesus clearly.** That is, to know that Jesus is the legitimate Messiah that has been promised by God. And Jesus alone can offer us new life. In fact, when we take communion, we not only remember the death and resurrection of Christ. We remember the fact that God went to the extraordinary lengths of love to be with us.
 - iv. Skye Jethani notes this reality in his summarizing of the Prodigal Son; he says,
 - 1. **Like the younger son, we often build our identities around what we receive from God. Or like the older son, we find our value in how we serve God. A great deal of effort is expended in faith communities trying to transform people from younger sons into older sons. But this is a fool's errand, because what mattered most to the father was neither the younger son's disobedience nor the older son's obedience, but having his sons with him. And so it is with our Heavenly Father. Reversing the rebellion of Eden and restoring what was lost can only be accomplished when we learn that at the center of God's heart is having his children with him.**¹¹
 - 2. As Christians, our identity had been changed, and so we are to act out of that new identity.
 - 3. Where are the saints? → They are with Christ.
 - a. **Jn. 15:4-7 - ⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. ⁵ I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**
 - b. **Jn. 17: 25-26 - ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them."**
- b. What strengthens my faithfulness?

¹⁰ Tom Wright, *Mark for Everyone* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 78–79.

¹¹ Skye Jethani, *With: Reimagining the way you relate to God* (2011), p. 95.

- i. My faithfulness is not exclusively strengthened by my effort, but is instead strengthened by my proximity to Jesus.
 - 1. Far from him → Often means unmoved by him.
 - a. This can lead to a hard heart. → This isn't merely a physical proximity to Jesus nor is it an academic proximity towards the idea of Jesus. We have seen in Mark how both of those are insufficient on their own.
 - i. You can come to church and remain unmoved.
 - ii. You can study the Bible and remain unconvinced.
 - 2. Close to him → Often means moved by him.
 - a. This is the question of motivation. How do I see Jesus?
 - i. The one who grants my pass into heaven?
 - ii. The one who desires to be with me? → Again, the one who is first worried about my being and then my doing.
- ii. How does my proximity to someone influence my heart's posture to them?
 - 1. This is a truth that we know in our lives. When we have distance from someone it is much easier to make them into a caricature. That is to misrepresent or misunderstand them. But, when we have proximity with them, conversation over a meal or around a table, it is much harder to hold to that caricature.
 - 2. Jesus doesn't want us to have a caricature of him. He wants us to experience him and know him in a transformational way. A way that resets our understanding of being and doing.