



The Gospel According to Mark

Lesson 4

Lesson 4 Commentary **Mark 6:1 – 8:30**
Lesson 5 Questions **Mark 8:31 – 10:52**

Introduction

Before we move into the actual scripture, let us recap where we have been. At this point, in Mark, Jesus has not left Galilee (remember, Mark is not big on chronology). Everything is event driven and “time is of the essence.” Here are a few of the places that we have been and where we are going.

- Capernaum (Jesus’s headquarters during his public ministry)
- Nazareth (Where Jesus grew up as the son of Joseph and Mary)
- Geresá (maybe Gadara, the home of the Gerasene Demoniac)
- Bethsaida (where Jesus walks on water)
- Caesarea Philippi (where Simon Peter makes his declaration)
- Mount Tabor (tradition has it that this is the site of the transfiguration)
- Cana (wedding feast in John, site of the first miracle – water to wine)

Simply because Mark does not choose to elaborate on chronology does not mean that he “conflicts” with the other Gospels. This is Mark’s style of writing. Remember, DV 11. “In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him *they made use of their powers and abilities*, so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.”

Chapter 6

Chapter 6, in the NRSVCE, has six sections.

- The Rejection of Jesus at Nazareth
- The Mission of the Twelve

- The Death of John the Baptist
- Feeding of the Five Thousand
- Jesus Walks on the Sea
- Jesus Heals the Sick in Gennersaret

The term Apostle means “one sent out.” While the death of John the Baptist is tragic, in Mark it does not change the direction of the narrative. One point to note is this is not the same “Herod” who slaughtered the innocent infants in Bethlehem. That was Herod the Great who was bonkers. Herod the Great killed his wife and three of his sons. This was a surviving son, Herod Antipas. John the Baptist had a problem with Herod Antipas’s wife, Herodias. I will talk more about this in the next lesson. In the last bullet, here, too, all that must happen is to touch Jesus’ robe, like the hemorrhaging woman in chapter 5. Having a “fringe” on His garment shows that Jesus is a devout Jew. Read Numbers 15:37-41, and you will find that, under Mosaic law, the fringes were there so that the Israelites would remember all of God’s commandments.

Starting with verse 6:1-6, we see a situation where Jesus returns to Nazareth and is rejected by the people because they are “familiar” with him. Effectively, they only saw him as Mary’s and Joseph’s son, not as a miracle worker or great teacher. One point of interest is in verse 3, where they name Jesus’s “brothers” James, Joses, Judas, and Simon. Citing CCC 500, “the Bible mentions brothers and sisters of Jesus. The Church has always understood these passages as not referring to other children of the Virgin Mary. In fact, James, and Joseph [from Matthew], “brothers of Jesus,” are the sons of another Mary, a disciple of Christ, whom St. Matthew significantly calls “the other Mary.” They are close relations of Jesus, according to an Old Testament expression.”

The feeding of the five thousand found in 6:30-44 is mentioned in all four Gospels! It is interesting that this event is preceded by being rejected by his own kin. Here, masses believe in Christ! The formula of the last supper is prefigured in this event. Reading Mark 6:41, “Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.” Now compare this to Mark 14:22. “While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said...” This is the only place in Mark where these four actions are grouped together. CCC 1335 reads, “The miracles of the multiplication of the loaves, when the Lord says the blessing, breaks and distributes the loaves through his disciples to feed the multitude, prefigure the superabundance of this unique bread of his Eucharist.” One last important point that we see in John’s version but not in Matthew, Mark or Luke is that the loaves and the fish were possessed by a “lad,” not the Apostles. Certainly, Jesus did not need the lad to perform a miracle, but the message, I believe, is that Christians need to give of their possessions for the good of the Church. We will talk more about the loaves a little later.

Jesus, again, walks on water in 6:45-52. We must return to the previous lecture related to chapter 4 where Jesus calms the storm. Here we have another pivotal moment in Christ’s Messianic identity. In Mark 6:51, when Jesus entered the boat, the winds ceased, just as in Mark

4. One other point of interest can be found Mark 6:50. In this verse, the Apostles are afraid because they believe Jesus to be a ghost. Jesus calms them by saying, “Take heart, it is I; have no fear.” The Greek term used for “I” is *ἐγώ εἰμι* (transliterated *ego eimi*). This term is the same term used when Moses asks YHWH his name in Exod 3:14 in the Septuagint (LXX). The term can be translated as “I” or as “I AM.” These words are haunting when we cover Mark 14. Lastly, read verses 51 and 52. Again, the narrator brings up the “loaves.” We will see this theme continue.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7, in the NRSVCE, has three sections.

- The Tradition of the Elders
- The Syrophoenician Woman’s Faith
- Jesus Cures a Deaf Man

The Syrophoenician Woman episode presents an interesting exchange between a Gentile woman and Jesus before he heals the woman’s daughter of demonic possession. While the words may seem harsh to us, the message is that the Gospel was first given to the Jews and then to the Gentiles. The woman exhibits great humility. However, when we get to Chapter 8, remember this event! The curing of the deaf man is interesting in that Christ prefigures the Sacraments with his use of material things (clothing, spittle, clay, and water) to cure illnesses. The last verse of this episode (Mark 7:37) quotes the messianic blessing found in Isaiah 35:4-6, specifically verse 5, “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.”

The first section shows one of the reasons that scholars believe that Mark’s audience was Gentile. Note in verse 3, 4 and 11 that Mark is explaining things about the Jewish practices that would have been unnecessary to explain if the audience was Jewish.

In verses 1-13, Jesus is condemning “traditions” instituted by the Pharisees that were deemed as authoritative as Laws of Moses. Sometimes the Catholic Church is accused of the same thing. The Church’s view is that there is a difference in “tradition” and “Tradition.” What the Pharisees were doing is what we would call lower-case “tradition.” They show a level of devotion but are not “required” or considered dogmas of the Church. Lower-case tradition can change. The difference is that the Catholic Church does not raise lower-case tradition to the level of dogma. Some may argue that anything outside of the Bible is lower-case tradition, but that position is not biblical. Look at 1 Corinthians 11:2. “I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions just as I handed them on to you.” Also look at 2 Thessalonians 2:15. “So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.” We know that the Bible does not contain everything that the Apostles were exposed to by reading John 21:25. “But there are

also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.” Yet Jesus told the Apostles in John 14:26 that when the Holy Spirit comes, the Apostles will remember everything that He said to them. “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” Since the early time of the Church, it has been taught that the Traditions were handed down from the Apostles and were preserved through Apostolic succession. However, many Traditions were not defined until challenged. Once a challenge was made, then debate would ensue over the true definition of the dogma. Several of the Marian doctrines fall into this category (the Immaculate Conception, the Bodily Assumption of Mary, the Mother of God).

In verse 11 we see the discussion of Corban. Corban was the practice that was done by many Jews of the time to keep from having to support elderly parents. If you said that all your possessions were to go to the Temple after one’s death, then you could assert that you cannot give money to help your parents as that would be taking goods away from God. Jesus condemns this practice. Honoring your mother and father was a commandment from God!

Lastly, read verses 18 and 19. Note the last sentence of 19 where, parenthetically, the narrator says that Jesus declares all foods clean. We can see throughout the remainder of the New Testament that the Jewish dietary laws were a significant sticking point (Acts 10:9-16, Romans 14:13-23, etc.). If Jesus declared all food clean, then the issue seems settled. This parenthetical was probably a side statement added by Mark after the fact showing that Christ’s teachings were taking a while to understand. Remember from session 1 that Mark wrote several years after the time of Christ, after the times in Acts and around the same time as Paul was writing his letters.

Mark 8:1-30

Mark 8:1-30, in the NRSVCE, has five sections.

- Feeding the Four Thousand
- The Demand for a Sign
- The Leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod
- Jesus Cures a Blind Man at Bethsaida
- Peter’s Declaration That Jesus is the Christ

I am going to take the first three sections as one because they round out the discussion of “loaves” that has been with us since Chapter 6. Once again, in verses 8:1-21, we have a lengthy event whereby Jesus uses loaves, bread, leaven (yeast), etc. to give a message. While the feeding of the five thousand is found in all four Gospels, the feeding of the four thousand is only found in Matthew and Mark. There are many similarities between the two feedings, but also differences. Loaves of bread and fish are involved, but in different numbers. A throng of people are

involved, but also in different number. The feeding of the four thousand happens in Gentile territory (from Matthew) and, thus, probably consisted of most Gentiles. There are leftovers, but, again, in different numbers. After feeding the four thousand, the Pharisees come and want a sign from Heaven. It seems that feeding four thousand was not good enough. Just as with the previous feeding, the Apostles enter a boat afterwards, but this time Jesus was on board and, again, a loaf of bread. He talks of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. Luke tells us in Luke 12:1 that the leaven of the Pharisees is hypocrisy. What is the leaven of Herod? Herod the Great and his sons were in power because of their allegiance to Rome. Herod the Great was not even an Israelite. He was an Edomite (descendant of Esau, the brother of Jacob (Israel)). They were interested in power and earthly possessions. “The leaven of Herod was the spirit of worldliness, preoccupation with pleasure and political ambitions.”¹ Again, the Apostles were clearly confused as they thought Jesus was talking about the fact that they had failed to take enough bread for the journey. You can almost feel Christ’s frustration! Then Christ seems to settle on the key point. The message is in the “leftovers!”

“While the symbolism of these numbers is nowhere made explicit, they most likely signify the nations who hear the gospel. The **twelve** (8:19) leftover baskets from the first episode represent the twelve tribes of Israel that Jesus gathers into the Church (Mt 15:24; 19:28). The **seven** (8:20) baskets of the second miracle represent the seven Gentile nations who once occupied the land of Canaan alongside Israel (Deut 7:1) and to whom Christ subsequently offers salvation. Jesus’ previous conversation with the Syrophenician (Canaanite) woman in 7:24–30 already established the point that Israel’s leftover bread would be given to Gentiles.”²

The fourth episode is interesting in that Jesus only partially performed a miracle and then had to “apply a little more miracle.” Most commentaries suggest that the message of this miracle is to indicate the Apostles’ and Jews’ gradual belief in Christ. It may also indicate the same in our lives.

The fifth section of this portion of Mark is Peter’s declaration that Jesus is the Messiah. Matthew puts more color around the declaration, but the importance of it is that the Apostles now get it! It has not been a secret to us, the readers, but it has been to the Apostles! While they now know he is the anointed one, they still do not know what that entails. We will see that next week!

¹ J. A. O’Flynn, “The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to St Mark,” in *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Bernard Orchard and Edmund F. Sutcliffe (Toronto; New York; Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson, 1953), 918.

² Scott Hahn and Curtis Mitch, *The Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The New Testament* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2010), 79.

QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 5

Mark 8:31 – 10:52

Day 1 – Scan the lecture notes. Write down one or two points that you consider most interesting.

Day 2 – Read Mark 8:31 – 9:1

Read Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12. What was Christ describing in Mark 8:31? (Hint: CCC 440, 536, 601, 608, 615, 623)

Day 3 – Read Mark 9:2 – 9:29

Why would Mark place the transfiguration directly after Jesus foretelling his death and resurrection?

Read Matthew 5:17. Why do you think that Moses and Elijah were chosen to appear at the transfiguration? What do they represent?

What could Moses, Elijah and Jesus have been talking about? (Hint: Luke 9:28 - 31)

Read Malachi 4:5. Why would Jesus be referring to Elijah in Mark 9:13?

Day 4 – Read Mark 9:30 – 50.

Read Numbers 11:26 – 30. How does Mark 9:38 relate to this?

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What type of figure of speech is Jesus using in Mark 9:42 – 48?

Read or recite the Apostles' Creed. Hell is mentioned in both the Creed and Mark 9:42 – 48. Are they the same? (Hint CCC 631 – 635)

Day 5 – Read Mark 10:1 – 16.

Read Luke 3:1 – 3. What connection do you see between these verses and Mark 10:1?

Read Deuteronomy 24:1 – 4. Why might Moses allow divorce? Is divorce ever addressed before Deuteronomy 24?

Why do you think the blessing of the children comes after the teachings on divorce?

Day 6 – Read Mark 10:17 - 52

What is the problem with riches and getting into Heaven?