

Mark 6:1-29
July 23, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: We have three storylines in today's passage, and of course they are all important! However, to kick off today's lesson, I am focusing on Jesus sending out his 12 disciples ***two by two*** to preach the gospel and minister to those in need. What are the advantages of having Christian partners to share the work in ministry? [Let people engage.]

Transition: You have drawn out the obvious advantages to do ministry with others. Eccl 4:9 says, "Two are better than one." Two disciples together will do more work than two disciples doing the work on their own. They will help one another to make good decisions, most likely commit fewer mistakes, help and encourage one another during hard times, etc. They will stir one another up when tempted to idleness, and guard against complacency or indifference. They will comfort one another when challenges occur. Eccles. 4:10 says, "Woe to him that is alone when he falls; for he has not another to help him up."

Jesus is teaching a principle that still applies today, i.e. all workers for Christ should work together and help one another whenever we can. Let's read the text.

BOOK:

A Prophet Without Honor

6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! ³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph (Greek Joses), 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.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

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 (unclean) 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. 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.

John the Baptist Beheaded

¹⁴ King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, (or he was saying) "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."

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." 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 (he did many things); 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. 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."

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.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

The harvest is undoubtedly great all over the world, both at home and abroad. The laborers are unquestionably few, and the supply of faithful men far less than the demand. The arguments for sending out men "one by one," under existing circumstances, are undeniably strong and weighty. But still the conduct of our Lord in this place is a striking fact. The fact that there is hardly a

single case in the Acts, where we find Paul or any other apostle working entirely alone, is another remarkable circumstance. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion, that if the rule of going forth "two and two" had been more strictly observed, the missionary field would have most likely yielded larger results than it has.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 1, pp. 129-131). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Mark 6:1–56

Charles Darwin said that *belief* was “the most complete of all distinctions between man and the lower animals.” If this observation is true, it suggests that lack of faith on man’s part puts him on the same level as the animals! Agnostic orator Col. Robert Ingersoll took a different point of view, for he once described a believer as “a songless bird in a cage.” You would probably agree that his words better describe an *unbeliever*!

One of the central themes in this section of Mark’s Gospel is the unbelief of people who came into contact with God’s Servant. All of these people had every reason to trust Jesus Christ, yet all of them failed to do so, including His own disciples! As you study this chapter, keep in mind the solemn admonition of Hebrews 3:12, “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” God takes unbelief seriously, and so should we.

The Unbelief of His Acquaintances (Mark 6:1–6)

Jesus returned to Nazareth where a year before He had been rejected by the people and evicted from the synagogue (Luke 4:16–30). It was certainly an act of grace on His part to give the

people another opportunity to hear His Word, believe, and be saved; and yet their hearts were still hard. This time, they did not evict Him: they simply did not take Him seriously.

Our Lord's reputation had once again preceded Him, so He was permitted to teach in the synagogue. Keep in mind that He was ministering to people who knew Him well, because Nazareth was His "hometown." However, these acquaintances had no spiritual perception at all. In fact, Jesus reminded them of what He had told them at that first dramatic visit, that a prophet is without honor in his own country and among his own people (Mark 6:4; Luke 4:24; John 4:44).

Two things astonished these people: His mighty works and His wonderful wisdom. Actually, Jesus did not do any mighty works while He was there, so the people must have been referring to the reports they had heard about His miracles (see Mark 1:28, 45; 3:7–8; 5:20–21). In fact, their unbelief hindered Jesus from having a greater ministry among them.

What was their problem? Why were they unable to trust Him and experience the wonders of His power and grace as had others? *They thought that they really knew Him.* After all, He had been their neighbor for nearly thirty years, they had seen Him at work in the carpenter's shop, and He appeared to be just another Nazarene. He was a "commoner" and the people saw no reason to commit themselves to Him!

"Familiarity breeds contempt" is a well-known maxim that goes all the way back to Publius the Syrian, who lived in 2 B.C. Aesop wrote a fable to illustrate it. In Aesop's fable, a fox had never before seen a lion, and when he first met the king of the beasts, the fox was nearly frightened to death. At their second meeting, the fox was not frightened quite as much; and the third time he met the lion, the fox went up and chatted with him! "And so it is," Aesop concluded, "that familiarity makes even the most frightening things seem quite harmless."

The maxim, however, must be taken with a grain of salt. For example, can you imagine a loving husband and wife thinking less of each other because they know each other so well? Or two dear friends starting to despise each other because their friendship has deepened over the years? Phillips Brooks said it best: "Familiarity breeds contempt, only with contemptible things or among contemptible people." The contempt shown by the Nazarenes said nothing about Jesus Christ, but it said a great deal about them!

A tourist, eager to see everything in the art gallery, fled from picture to picture, scarcely noticing what was in the frames. "I didn't see anything very special here," he said to one of the guards as he left. "Sir," the guard replied, "it is not the pictures that are on trial here—it is the visitors."

A carpenter was a respected artisan in that day, but nobody expected a carpenter to do miracles or teach profound truths in the synagogue. Where did He get all this power and wisdom? From God or from Satan? (see Mark 3:22) And why did His brothers and sisters not possess this same power and wisdom? Even more, why did His brothers and sisters not believe in Him? The people who called Him "the son of Mary" were actually insulting Him; because in that day you identified a man by calling him the son of his father, not the son of his mother.

The people of Nazareth were "offended at Him," which literally means "they stumbled over Him." The Greek word gives us our English word *scandalize*. Kenneth Wuest wrote in his book *Wuest's Word Studies* (Eerdmans), "They could not explain Him, so they rejected Him." Jesus was certainly a "stone of stumbling" to them because of their unbelief (Isa. 8:14; Rom. 9:32–33; 1 Peter 2:8).

Twice in the Gospel record you find Jesus marveling. As this passage reveals, He marveled at the unbelief of the Jews, and He marveled at the great faith of a Roman centurion, a Gentile

(Luke 7:9). Instead of remaining at Nazareth, Jesus departed and made another circuit of the towns and villages in Galilee. His heart was broken as He saw the desperate plight of the people (Matt. 9:35–38), so He decided to send out His disciples to minister with His authority and power.

The Unbelief of His Enemies (Mark 6:7–29)

When the Lord originally called the 12 Apostles, His purpose was to teach and train them so that they might assist Him and eventually be able to take His place when He returned to the Father (Mark 3:13–15). Before sending them out, He reaffirmed their authority to heal and to cast out demons (Mark 6:7); and He gave them some pointed instructions (see Matt. 10 for a more detailed account of this sermon).

He told them to take what they already owned and not go out and buy special equipment for their itinerant travels. They were not to be loaded down with extra baggage. (You cannot miss the note of urgency in this “commissioning sermon.”) Jesus wanted them to be adequately supplied, but not to the point of ceasing to live by faith. The word *bag* means “a beggar’s bag.” They were definitely not to beg for either food or money.

As they ministered from place to place, they would encounter both hospitality and hostility, both friends and enemies. He cautioned them to stay at one house in each community and not to “pick and choose” when it came to their food and accommodations. After all, they were there to be profitable servants, not pampered guests. If a house or a village did not receive them, they had His permission to declare God’s judgment on those people. It was customary for the Jews to shake the dust off their feet whenever they left Gentile territory, but for Jews to do this to their fellow Jews would be something new (Luke 10:10–11; Acts 13:51).

The word translated “send” in Mark 6:7 is *apostello* in the Greek and gives us our English word *apostle*. It means “to send someone with a special commission to represent another and to accomplish his work.” Jesus gave these twelve men both the apostolic authority and the divine ability to do the job He sent them to do. They were not “on their own”; they represented Him in all that they did and said.

We noted before (Mark 3:16–19) that a comparison of the lists of the Apostles’ names reveals that the names are given in several pairs: Peter and Andrew, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, etc. Jesus sent them out in pairs because it is always easier and safer for servants to travel and work together. “Two are better than one” (Ecc. 4:9), and the Law, as previously observed, required two witnesses to verify a matter (Deut. 17:6; 19:15; 2 Cor. 13:1). They would not only help each other; they would also learn from each other.

The men went out and did what Jesus told them to do. It is remarkable that a band of ordinary men could go out in this way to represent Almighty God, and that they could demonstrate their authority by performing miracles. God’s commandments always include His enablements (2 Cor. 3:5–6). They proclaimed the Good News of the kingdom, called on sinners to repent, and healed many who were sick (Mark 6:12–13; Luke 9:6).

The reports of Christ’s ministry, augmented by that of His disciples (Luke 9:7), even reached into the palace of Herod Antipas. Mark called Him “King,” which is what Herod wanted to be called; but in reality, godless Herod was only a tetrarch, the ruler of a fourth part of the nation. When Herod the Great died, the Romans divided his territory among his three sons; and Antipas was made tetrarch of Perea and Galilee.

Herod Antipas had married the daughter of King Aretas IV and then had divorced her so he could marry Herodias, the wife of his half brother, Herod Philip. It was a wicked alliance that

was contrary to the Law of Moses (Lev. 18:16; 20:21), and the fearless John the Baptist had denounced the king for his sins. When Herod heard about the wonderful works of Jesus, he was sure that John the Baptist had come back from the dead to haunt him and condemn him! Herod's conscience was bothering him, but he was unwilling to face his sins honestly and repent.

At this point, Mark shifted into a flashback to explain how John the Baptist had been cruelly and unjustly arrested and slain. Even in this brief account, we sense the tension in the palace, for Herod feared John, privately listened to him preach, and was in a state of perplexity over what he should do. "Queen" Herodias, on the other hand, hated John, wanted to kill him, and patiently waited for the most convenient time. In their evil character and lawless deeds, these two remind us of Ahab and Jezebel (1 Kings 18–21).

The "strategic day" came (Mark 6:21, NASB) for Herodias to put her plan into action: the celebration of Herod's birthday. Royal feasts were extravagant both in their display of wealth and in their provision for pleasure. The Jews would not have permitted a woman to dance before a group of men, and most Gentile mothers would have forbidden a daughter to do what the daughter of Herodias did. (History informs us that the girl's name was Salome.) But the girl was a part of the mother's plan to get rid of John the Baptist, and Salome played her part well.

When Herod heard the girl's macabre request, he was "greatly distressed" (see Mark 14:34, where the same verb is used of Jesus); but he had to be true to his promise or lose face before a group of influential people. The word *oath* in Mark 6:26 is actually in the plural - "for his many oaths' sake"—because Herod had repeatedly declared his desire to reward the girl for her performance. This was one way he had of impressing his guests, but it backfired. Herod had not been courageous enough to obey John's word, but now he had to obey his own word! The result was the death of an innocent man.

It is remarkable that there is no evidence that any of the Jewish leaders did anything to rescue John the Baptist after he had been arrested. The common people considered John a prophet sent from God, but the religious leaders did not obey John's message (Mark 11:27–33). John's death was the first of three notable violent deaths in the history of Israel. The other two are the crucifixion of Christ and the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7). For the significance of these events, review the comments on Mark 3:22–30. Herod had feared that John's messages would stir up a revolt among the people, something he wanted to avoid. Also, he wanted to please his wife, even though it meant the murdering of a godly man. John's disciples were permitted to take the body of their leader and bury it, and then they went to tell Jesus what had happened (Matt. 14:12). No doubt the report of John's death deeply stirred our Lord, for He knew that one day His own life would be laid down.

We meet Herod Antipas one more time in the Gospels, when he "tried" Jesus and hoped to see the Lord perform a miracle (Luke 23:6–12). Jesus would not even speak to this adulterer and murderer, let alone please him by doing a miracle! Jesus called Herod a "fox" (Luke 13:31–35), an apt description of this crafty man. In A.D. 39, Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:1), nephew of Herod Antipas, denounced his uncle to the Roman emperor, and Antipas was deposed and sent into exile. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36)

Grassmick, J. D. (1985). *Mark*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 126-129) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

F. Conclusion: Jesus' rejection at Nazareth (6:1–6a) (Matt. 13:53–58)

6:1. From Capernaum **Jesus** went about 20 miles southwest to **His hometown**, Nazareth (cf. 1:9, 24), where He had lived and ministered previously (cf. Luke 4:16–30). He was **accompanied by His disciples**, returning as a Teacher (Rabbi) surrounded by His students. This was a public mission, and He was preparing His disciples by example for their own missions (cf. Mark 6:7–13).

6:2–3. On **the Sabbath ... He taught in the synagogue** (cf. 1:21), probably expounding on the Law and the Prophets. **Many ... were amazed** (*exēplēssonto*, “astounded, struck out, overwhelmed”; cf. 1:22; 7:37; 10:26; 11:18) at His teaching.

But some asked disparaging questions about the origin of (a) **these things**, His teaching, (b) the **wisdom ... given Him** (lit., “to this One”), and (c) His power to do **miracles** elsewhere (cf. 6:5). Only two answers were possible: His source was God, or Satan (cf. 3:22).

Despite His impressive words and deeds, He was too ordinary for them. The derogatory question, **Isn’t this the carpenter?** implied, “He is a common laborer like the rest of us.” All His immediate family—mother, brothers, and sisters—were known to the townspeople, and they were ordinary people. The phrase **Mary’s Son** was also derogatory since a man was not described as his mother’s son in Jewish usage even if she was a widow, except by insult (cf. Jud. 11:1–2; John 8:41; 9:29). Their words, calculated insults, also suggested they knew there was something unusual about Jesus’ birth.

His brothers and **sisters** (cf. Mark 3:31–35) were most likely children of Joseph and Mary born after Jesus’ birth rather than Joseph’s children by a previous marriage or Jesus’ cousins. **James** became a leader in the early church at Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:13–21), and authored the Epistle of James (James 1:1). **Judas** was probably Jude, author of the Epistle of Jude (Jude 1). Nothing more is known of **Joses** and **Simon** or His sisters. Perhaps Joseph was not mentioned because he was already dead.

Thus, since the townspeople could not explain Jesus, **they took offense** (from *skandalizomai*, “to be caused to stumble, to be repelled”; cf. comments on Mark 14:27) **at Him**, finding no reason to believe He was God’s Anointed One.

6:4. **Jesus** responded to their rejection with the proverb that a prophet is not appreciated at **home**. He was like an Old Testament **prophet** (cf. v. 15; 8:28) whose words were often rejected and who was dishonored most by those who knew Him best (cf. 6:17–29).

6:5–6a. Because of such persistent unbelief Jesus **could not do any miracles there except to lay His hands on** (cf. 5:23) **a few sick people and heal them**. There was no limitation on His power, but His purpose was to perform miracles in the presence of faith. Only a few here had faith to come to Him for healing.

Even Jesus **was amazed** (*ethaumasen*, “astonished”; cf. 5:20; 12:17; 15:5, 44) **at their** unbelief, their unwillingness to believe that His wisdom and power were from God. So far as is known, He never returned to Nazareth.

The people of Nazareth represent Israel’s blindness. Their refusal to believe in Jesus pictured what the disciples would soon experience (cf. 6:7–13) and what Mark’s readers (then and now) would experience in the advance of the gospel.

V. Jesus’ Ministry in and beyond Galilee (6:6b–8:30)

The third major section of Mark’s Gospel begins structurally like the first two sections (cf. 6:6b with 1:14–15 and 3:7–12; 6:7–34 with 1:16–20 and 3:13–19), but concludes with Peter’s confession of Jesus as Messiah (8:27–30) instead of a statement of rejection (cf. 3:6; 6:1–6a). During this phase of His ministry Jesus directed more attention to His disciples. In the face of

opposition, He revealed to them by both words and deeds who He really is. Much of this time was spent outside of Galilee.

A. *Introductory summary: Jesus' teaching tour of Galilee (6:6b) (Matt. 9:35–38)*

6:6b. This statement summarizes Jesus' third tour of Galilee (for the first, cf. 1:35–39; Mark did not mention the second, cf. Luke 8:1–3). Despite His rejection at Nazareth, **Jesus** was going **around** the neighboring villages **teaching** (cf. Mark 1:21). This set the stage for the Twelve's mission.

B. *Jesus' sending forth of the Twelve and John the Baptist's death (6:7–31)*

This section has a “sandwich” structure (cf. 3:20–35; 5:21–43). The narrative of the mission of the Twelve (6:7–13, 30–31) is divided by the account of John the Baptist's death (6:14–29). This indicates that the death of John the messenger did not silence his message. The forerunner's death prefigured Jesus' death. And Jesus' message would still be proclaimed by His followers.

1. THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE (6:7–13) (Matt. 10:1, 5–15; Luke 9:1–6)

6:7. In order to extend His ministry on this Galilean tour, Jesus **sent** (from *apostellō*; cf. 3:14; 6:30) **the Twelve out two by two**, a common practice in that day for practical and legal reasons (cf. 11:1; 14:13; John 8:17; Deut. 17:6; 19:15).

The Twelve were His authorized representatives in keeping with the Jewish concept of *šēlūhîm*, that is, a man's representative (*šālīah*) was considered as the man himself (cf. Matt. 10:40 and TDNT, sub verb “*apostolos*,” 1:413–27). They were to fulfill a *special* commission and bring back a report (cf. Mark 6:30); so Jesus' unusual instructions (vv. 8–11) pertained only to that particular mission.

He **gave them authority** (*exousian*; the “right” and the “power”; cf. 2:10; 3:15) **over evil spirits**. This power to exorcise demons (cf. 1:26) would authenticate their preaching (cf. 6:13; 1:15).

6:8–9. The urgency of their mission required that they travel lightly. They were to **take a staff** (*rhabdon*, “walking stick”) and to **wear sandals** (ordinary footwear). **But** they were **not** to take **bread** (food), a **bag** (probably a traveler's bag for provisions, not a beggar's bag), **money** (small copper coins easily tucked in their cloth **belts**), or **an extra tunic**, additional inner garment used as a covering at night. They were to depend on God to provide food and shelter through the hospitality of Jewish households.

The two concessions of a staff and sandals are unique to Mark. Both are forbidden in Matthew 10:9–10, and the staff is forbidden in Luke 9:3. Matthew used *ptaomai* (“to procure, acquire”), instead of *airō* (“to take”); so the disciples were not to acquire *additional* staffs or sandals—but to use the ones they already had. Mark and Luke both use *airō*, “to take or carry along.” But Luke says, “Take nothing for the journey—no staff (*rhabdon*),” presumably no additional staff; while Mark says, “Take nothing for the journey *except* (cf. Mark 6:5) a staff (*rhabdon*),” presumably the one already in use. Each writer stressed a different aspect of Jesus' instructions.

6:10–11. **Whenever** the disciples entered **a house** as invited guests, they were to **stay there** making it their base of operations **until** they left the **town**. They were not to impose on the hospitality of many people or accept more attractive offers once they were settled.

They should also expect rejection. **If any place** (a household, synagogue, village) would **not** offer hospitality **or listen to** their message, they were to **leave** there and to **shake the dust off** their **feet**. Devout Jews did this when they left Gentile (alien) territory to show that they were dissociating themselves from it. This would tell Jewish hearers they were acting like pagans in rejecting the disciples' message.

This was to be done **as a testimony** (cf. 1:44; 13:9) **against** the citizens. It warned them that the disciples' responsibility to them had been fulfilled and those who rejected the message would have to answer to God for themselves (cf. Acts 13:51; 18:6). No doubt it provoked serious thought and perhaps repentance by some. The KJV statement regarding Sodom and Gomorrah is not in the earliest Greek manuscripts of Mark's text (cf. Matt. 10:15).

6:12–13. In obedience the Twelve **preached** repentance (cf. 1:4, 14–15), **drove out many demons** (cf. 1:32–34, 39), and healed **many sick people** (cf. 3:10). As Jesus' representatives (cf. 6:7; 9:37) they learned that His power extended beyond His personal presence. Their mission showed the coming of God's kingdom (cf. 1:15).

Anointing the sick **with oil** is unique to Mark. This use of olive oil was both because of its medicinal properties (cf. Luke 10:34; James 5:14) and its symbolic value indicating that the disciples acted by Jesus' authority and power, not their own.

2. THE BEHEADING OF JOHN THE BAPTIST (6:14–29) (Matt. 14:1–12; Luke 3:19–20; 9:7–9)

a. *Popular explanations of Jesus' identity (6:14–16)*

6:14–16. The miraculous activity of Jesus and the Twelve throughout Galilee caught the attention of **Herod** Antipas I, son of Herod the Great (see the chart on the Herods at Luke 1:5). Herod Antipas was *tetrarch* (ruler of a fourth part of his father's kingdom) of Galilee and Perea under the aegis of Rome from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39 (cf. Matt. 14:1; Luke 3:19; 9:7). Officially he was not a **king** but Mark's use of the title probably reflected local custom in view of Herod's covetous ambitions.

Mark 6:14b–15 presents three opinions which attempt to account for Jesus' **miraculous powers**; He was (a) **John the Baptist** (cf. 1:4–9) risen **from the dead**, (b) **Elijah** (cf. Mal. 3:1; 4:5–6), or (c) **a prophet**, resuming the suspended line of Israel's **prophets**.

Despite other opinions **Herod**, troubled by a guilty conscience, remained convinced that Jesus was **the man** he had **beheaded**. Herod believed **John** the Baptist was risen **from the dead** and was using miraculous powers. Mark 6:17–29 explains verse 16 in a “flashback.”

b. *Flashback: the execution of John the Baptist (6:17–29)*

Mark included this section not only to supplement 1:14 and further clarify 6:16, but also to provide a “passion narrative” of Jesus' forerunner that foreshadowed and paralleled Jesus' own suffering and death. Mark focused on what Herod and Herodias did to John. Perhaps he included so many details to draw a parallel to the Elijah-Jezebel conflict since Jesus later identified John as Elijah (9:11–13).

6:17–18. Mark explained (*gar, for*) that **Herod himself had** ordered **John** to be **put in prison**. According to Josephus, this prison was at the fortress-palace of Machaerus near the northeastern shore of the Dead Sea (*The Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 5. 2). Herod **did this because of Herodias**, an ambitious woman who was his second **wife**. Herod had first married a daughter of the Arabian king, Aretas IV. Then he became enamored with his half-niece Herodias (daughter of his half-brother, Aristobulus) who was married to Herod's half-brother (**brother**

means half-brother) Philip (her half-uncle; cf. Josephus *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18. 5. 1–2). They had a daughter, Salome. **Herod** divorced his wife in order to marry Herodias who had divorced Philip (not the Philip of Luke 3:1). **John had** repeatedly denounced this marriage as unlawful (cf. Lev. 18:16; 20:21).

6:19–20. John’s bold rebuke infuriated **Herodias** who **nursed a grudge against** him (lit., “had it in for him”). Not satisfied with John’s imprisonment, she **wanted to kill him, but** her plans were thwarted **because Herod feared John** (had a superstitious dread of him), whom he knew was **a righteous and holy man**. So he **protected** John from Herodias’ murderous intentions by keeping him in prison—a shrewd compromise.

In spite of his immoral lifestyle, **Herod** was fascinated by John. He had a certain attraction for John’s preaching, but it left him **greatly puzzled**. The words “greatly puzzled” (*polla ēporei*) have good manuscript support and are preferred on contextual grounds to the reading “he did many things” (*polla epoiei*; NIV; KJV), a reading that may reflect an error of hearing by scribes who copied the text as it was read to them. Herod’s conflict between his passion for Herodias and his respect for John showed his vacillating moral weakness.

6:21–23. **Finally** (cf. v. 19) Herodias found an opportunity to carry out a murderous scheme. The occasion was Herod’s **birthday ... banquet**, a luxurious celebration he gave **for his high officials** (in civil government), **military commanders, and the leading men** (prominent citizens) **of Galilee**. Herodias deliberately sent (implied by vv. 24–25) her **daughter**, Salome, into the banquet room to dance in a way that would win Herod’s approval.

Salome was a young woman of marriageable age (*korasion*, “girl”; cf. Es. 2:2, 9; Mark 5:41–42), probably in her middle teens. Her skillful and provocative dance **pleased Herod and his ... guests**, and led him to make her an ostentatious, rash offer as a reward. **He** arrogantly **promised her** anything she wanted and sealed it **with an oath** (cf. Es. 5:6) which included the words **up to half my kingdom** (cf. Es. 7:2). Actually Herod had no “kingdom” (realm) to give (cf. comments on Mark 6:14). He used a proverbial saying for generosity which Salome knew was not to be taken literally (cf. 1 Kings 13:8).

6:24–25. When Salome asked **her mother what** she should **ask for**, Herodias replied with premeditated promptness, **The head of John the Baptist**. She wanted proof that he was dead. **At once** (*euthys*; cf. 1:10) Salome **hurried back to the king with** her macabre **request**. She demanded that the deed be done **right now** (*exautēs*, “at once”) before Herod could find a way to avoid it. She added the words **on a platter**, suggested perhaps by the festive occasion.

6:26–28. Salome’s request deeply grieved (cf. 14:34) Herod. **But because of his oaths** (considered irrevocable) and to save face before **his dinner guests** (cf. 6:21) **he did not** have the courage to reject it. **So he immediately** (*euthys*) ordered the request to be fulfilled.

An executioner (*spekoulatora*, a Latin loanword, probably a bodyguard) **beheaded John in the prison** of the fortress, **brought ... his head on a platter** to Salome in the banquet hall. **She** in turn **gave it to** Herodias (cf. 9:12–13). John had been silenced, but his message to Herod still stood.

6:29. When **John’s disciples** (cf. Matt. 11:2–6) heard about his death, they **came ... took his body, and put it in a tomb**.

Church, C.L. (1998). *Mark In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (pp. 433-434). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.*

SCANDAL OF FAMILIARITY (6:1–6A)

At Nazareth Jesus experienced the scandal of familiarity: He's just a carpenter, just Mary's son—who knows who His father really is? We know His brothers and sisters.

But Mark's readers will recall that Jesus' family is now the community of those who do God's will. The Greek term rendered "took offense" (v. 6) is the polar opposite of "believe in" and is often used for the Jewish rejection of Jesus (Matt. 11:6; Rom. 9:33; 1 Cor. 1:23; Gal. 5:11). Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith" (Mark 6:6) and "could not do any miracles there" except heal a few people. Jesus' miracles were God's response to human need and faith, not magic tricks performed to impress the crowds. John 1:11–12 perhaps provides the best commentary on this account: "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (NRSV).

MISSION OF THE TWELVE (6:6B–44)

Jesus' rejection by "his own" prepares for the gathering of His new people anticipated in 3:35. The mission of the Twelve "sandwiches" the account of John's martyrdom underscoring the danger of preaching repentance. Jesus set the pattern for the mission of the Twelve by His preaching, healing, and exorcisms. Though the authority given the disciples to heal and exorcise demons was a sign of the kingdom, Jesus only commissioned them to preach repentance, not the good news of the kingdom (see 1:15). The mission instructions evidence absolute dependence on God for support and allude to the exodus. The disciples, like Jesus before them, were to experience rejection as well as welcome.

The question of Jesus' identity introduces the account of John's death. John's full significance is seen only later in relation to Jesus, whose fate he foreshadows. Like Jesus, John was arrested, recognized as righteous and holy, nevertheless executed, and laid in a tomb. Jesus' end, however, distinguishes Him as the more powerful Coming One, whose sandals John counted himself unworthy to tie.

"Sheep without a shepherd" serves as an image for God's people without spiritual leadership. Jesus' initial response to the crowd's need was teaching. The details of the crowd seated on "green grass" and fully satisfied recall the shepherd of Psalm 23 who made his sheep lie down in green pasture (Ps. 23:2, 5). The miraculous feeding of the five thousand establishes Jesus as the true Shepherd of God, but it also points to the future ministry of the disciples. Jesus' use of the Twelve to feed the crowd of five thousand suggests a pattern for future ministry in which Jesus provides the disciples with resources for ministry.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). Mark 6:1-29. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.