

MARK 6

Mark 6:1–6

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 372–381.

Jesus’s “own country” is Nazareth. A visit to His hometown is mentioned briefly by Matthew (13:54–58) and in more detail by Luke (4:16–30). Although the people do not dispute Jesus’s wisdom or ability to perform mighty works, they do question where such understanding and ability came from. Rather than admire His ability, they appear to be unable to think of Jesus as anything more than a local carpenter and are “offended”—from the Greek *skandalizo*—suggesting they distrust Him. Verse 3, incidentally, is the only reference in the scriptures to Jesus’s profession.

This story underscores the point that miracles do not produce faith. The residents of Nazareth are aware of the miracles that Jesus has performed elsewhere, but their own unbelief has curtailed the possibility of further miracles. Whereas the Nazarenes are at first “astonished” at Jesus’s teaching, Jesus now has occasion to marvel at their lack of faith. Their “unbelief” (Greek *apistia*) does not indicate a disbelief in Jesus’s ability but rather a lack of personal trust in Him.

Mark 6:7–13

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 382–388.

It is important to note that the instructions that Jesus gives to the Twelve here are not universally applicable but rather are tailored for this specific assignment. The instructions will force the Twelve to rely on

the mercies of God and the hospitality of the people—they are only permitted to carry a staff, presumably for protection. It’s difficult to know precisely what the significance of shaking the dust was, but it may have its roots in Jewish customs of shaking off the dust of Gentile lands before entering the holy land of Israel. The Apostles preach a remarkably simple message and are met with much success—unlike among the faithless residents of Nazareth, the healings and exorcisms come freely.

Mark 6:14–29

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 389–410.

The Apostles’ mission brings further attention to Jesus, and yet no one truly understands who He is. The people’s varying guesses all strike at part of the truth, but no one realizes that Jesus is the Messiah. Herod Antipas is full of paranoia, believing that Jesus is John the Baptist, whom he had just executed, risen from the dead. The Jewish historian Josephus, although he differs in a few details, corroborates Mark’s account that John the Baptist was executed by Herod Antipas. The flashback details of the Baptist’s death are saturated with references to the Old Testament—the careful reader may notice echoes of Jephthah, Jezebel, and Esther (not to mention the similar story in Ether 8). Mark’s account of the Baptist’s execution also foreshadows Jesus’s execution, as the two stories share some important themes.

Mark 6:30–44

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 400–424.

After the flashback to John the Baptist’s execution, Mark resumes his narrative by reporting the return of the Twelve. Somewhat surprisingly, after Jesus’s rejection in Nazareth and John the Baptist’s death, the Apostles have found success. Jesus and the Twelve attempt to find solitude, but when Jesus’s popularity prevents this, He has compassion and begins to teach the crowds. “Sheep not having a shepherd” draws on Old Testament themes of leadership and divine providence.

Verse 35 represents another example of the disciples not fully understanding Jesus’s mission nor His capabilities but trying to counsel Jesus on how to handle His ministry. None of them anticipate the miraculous steps that Jesus will take to provide for the situation. For many in the audience, the miracle must have served as a reminder of God’s provision of manna in the wilderness. For those of us who know the entire story, we can also see a prefiguring of the Last Supper and institution of the sacrament. It may also remind us of the yet future messianic banquet (Isaiah 25:6–9), when at the Second Coming, the Lord will prepare a feast to fill all our needs.

Mark 6:45–56

The following is adapted from Julie M. Smith, The Gospel according to Mark (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 2019), 424–434.

“Straightway” (Greek *euthys*) indicates a sense of urgency. The Gospel of John adds that following the miracle of feeding five thousand, the people try to make Jesus their king (to presumably lead a revolt against Rome), and perhaps this motivates His rush to depart to a mountain. The disciples go down to the sea and are struggling against a headwind when they see Jesus walking on the water. They assume He is some sort of apparition, even though the ghosts of Greco-Roman imagination could not walk on water. Jesus speaks to them with the self-identifier “it is I” (Greek *egō eimi*), which recalls Exodus 3:14 (“I am that I am”) as a name for God. But Mark makes it clear that the disciples do not fully grasp the significance of the situation. Jesus has attempted to reveal Himself as the God of Israel, but the Twelve are not ready to understand this.

Jesus sent the disciples to Bethsaida (Mark 6:45), but they have ended up at Gennesaret, some distance to the southwest. It is possible that the strong winds have blown them off course, or perhaps this story is out of chronological order. In contrast to the Twelve’s failure to grasp Jesus’s identity, the crowds in Gennesaret recognize Jesus immediately, and their confidence in His abilities leads to many healings.

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Source: *New Testament Insights: Mark* by Jackson Abhau and John Thompson