

ON MISSION WITH JESUS
An Exposition of Mark 6:1-13
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Series: Mark: Knowing and Following God's Son
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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of Mark's Gospel is to tell us who Jesus is. The question at the end of Chapter 4 captures the point: "Who then is this?" (Mark 4:41) And all along the way Mark is giving us glimpses of the answer. In fact, he wastes no time getting started: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1) Later in Chapter 1, the Father's "voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."" (Mark 1:11) In Chapter 2, Jesus is "the Son of Man [who] has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10) and who also "is lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:28). Chapters 4-5 continue to reveal the divine authority of Jesus: He is able to command storms, and they hush; demons and diseases, and they flee; death, and it is undone. Over and over again, we behold Jesus, the true King who brings grace to our broken world. We must always keep the main thing the main thing.

That said, it is also part of Mark's purpose to tell us what it means for us as disciples to follow Jesus. It isn't enough to behold Him – we must also believe in Him and become part of what He is doing. Thus rings His clear call: "Follow me" (Mark 1:17, 2:14). The call to follow Jesus involves the undeserved privilege of participating with Him in His mission. This is evident from the get-go: "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)

True disciples are in fellowship with Jesus, learn from Jesus, and in due course are sent out by Jesus. True disciples are on mission with Jesus. Before I read Mark 6:1-13, I want to remind us of the team-building event that took place back in Mark 3:13-15. Mark told us,

“And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.” (Mark 3:13-15)

Remember, “preaching... and casting out demons” (Mark 1:39) is precisely what Jesus was doing. He called the twelve apostles – these lead disciples, these model disciples – to do what He was doing. Of course, the starting point is to “be with him” – to learn from Him, observe Him, listen to Him, experience life with Him, absorb His manner of life, and catch His vision for the kingdom of God. Which means that as we read through the Gospel of Mark, we should understand that part of what is happening is that the disciples are always ‘in training’ – and one of the things I want to do in this sermon is to pull together some of the lessons that they have been learning – lessons that we also need to learn and apply!

But just remember: in Mark 3:14 Jesus appointed the apostles with a view toward sending them out, and in Mark 6:7 He begins to send them out. This is not their ultimate sending out, but it is an important part of the preparation process. All along the way, the disciples are learning from Jesus.

THE SCRIPTURAL TEXT

Holy Scripture says:

¹ He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. ² And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished, saying, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands? ³ Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him. ⁴ And Jesus said to them, “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.”⁵ And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them. ⁶ And he marveled because of their unbelief.

And he went about among the villages teaching.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— ⁹ but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics. ¹⁰ And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there. ¹¹ And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.” ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (Mark 6:1-13)

JESUS ENCOUNTERS UNBELIEF IN HIS HOMETOWN

In Mark Chapters 1, 2, 4, and the second half of 5, Jesus ministered extensively in Capernaum, a seaside town by the Sea of Galilee. Mark 1:38-39 told us that Jesus also visited other towns “throughout all Galilee” (Mark 1:39), but the bulk of Mark’s attention is on Capernaum.

Chapter 6 begins, however, with an important trip inland: “He went away from there and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.” File that away for later in the sermon: *the disciples continue to be with Jesus and learn from Him, prior to their being sent out.*

As it happens, Jesus’ hometown was Nazareth, located about 20 miles to the southwest of Capernaum. Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and from there the holy family had to flee to Egypt because King Herod was seeking to slaughter the holy child. Once they returned to Israel, they settled in Nazareth. The boy Jesus grew up in Nazareth, came of age in Nazareth, and lived his early adulthood in Nazareth. He would have been known as a faithful Jew – exemplary in character and conduct, of course, but otherwise ordinary and unassuming. God’s Son didn’t enter into our world as ‘boy wonder’ or ‘child prodigy’. He was extraordinary – indeed, sinless – in attitude and demeanor, but as a youth He was not extraordinary in terms of ambition or accomplishment. Jesus’ ordinariness is part of the wonder of the Incarnation.

So, as a man now in His early 30s, the residents of His hometown were unprepared for this outwardly ordinary man to stand up in the local synagogue

and speak with such clarity and urgency: “And on the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astonished” (v. 2).

When Jesus taught in the Capernaum synagogue, the people “were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes.” (Mark 1:22) But the folks in Capernaum had an advantage: they had not been familiar with Jesus for the first 30 years of His life. To them, Jesus was a charismatic figure who had come from somewhere else, and now He had their attention. It makes sense that they compared Him to the other teachers that they had heard over the years, and they knew that Jesus stood out. The scribes could wax eloquent with all their secondhand learning. But with Jesus there was firsthand knowledge; clarity of content; directness and simplicity of speech; utter confidence in His understanding of God’s kingdom (confidence, yes, but not arrogance); and His words cut to the chase *and* to the heart.

But the folks in Nazareth had a unique problem – and they didn’t handle it well. Their problem is that they had known Jesus as an ordinary child and ordinary youth and ordinary young man in their small little town. If they had had eyes to see the truth, this wouldn’t have been a problem. If they had the disposition of faith to receive the One whom the Father had sent, their familiarity with Jesus wouldn’t have been a problem. Indeed it shouldn’t have been a problem. But the truth of the matter is that their own hearts were not properly aligned with the kingdom of God. And when hearts are misaligned, familiarity breeds contempt. To be clear, familiarity does not breed contempt among those with holy and healthy hearts. But familiarity does breed contempt when hearts are short on love.

So the townspeople of Nazareth are trying to square the astonishing nature of Jesus’ ministry with the ordinary nature of Jesus’ upbringing, and they can’t square it. In their minds, an ordinary small town plus an ordinary family plus a seemingly ordinary person from that family plus an ordinary vocation (carpentry) cannot yield an extraordinary teacher-and-healer.[1] They ask, “Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?” (v. 2) They can’t deny that He has become special, above average, and consequential, but they can only accept it with a measure of cynicism. Discern their tone: *What makes Him so special? Why should He be the recipient of such remarkable gifts?* They were just sizing things up from a mere human perspective – and they were not rejoicing in His growing stature, but they

were rather resenting it. To them, Jesus was just ordinary: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon?” (v. 3) To them, Jesus was just a carpenter, just another son of Mary, just one sibling among many. *Why should He be set apart? Why should He be a cut above the rest of us?*

“And they took offense at him” (v. 3) – He rubbed them the wrong way, He stirred up the gunk of their filthy hearts, He exposed their envious and critical hearts, and by way of response, their self-protecting defense mechanisms went into full gear. They didn’t want Jesus around. In fact, Mark understates the hostility. Luke 4 tells us that the people of Nazareth were so angry that “they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, he went away.” (Luke 4:29-30)

Nazareth is as Unclean as Gentile Country

There is great tragedy here. What it shows us is that the hearts of Israelites and the hearts of Gentiles are fundamentally the same. When Jesus visited “the country of the Gerasenes” (Mark 5:1) and healed the demon-possessed man, all the villagers and residents of that Gentile region “[begged] Jesus to depart from their region.” (Mark 5:17) *They pushed away the grace that could have been theirs.* And how many mighty works did Jesus do in the Gerasene country? Just one, right? Now in Mark 6 we are in the land of Israel, in the hometown where Jesus grew up, and the people acted just like the Gentiles across the sea – the residents of Nazareth also wanted Jesus out of their town. *They pushed away the grace that could have been theirs.* And how many might works did Jesus do in Nazareth? Very few: “And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.” (v. 5) At its heart, Nazareth is just as unclean as the demon-infested pig-country of Gerasena.

Hometown Dishonor

Jesus, who is the ultimate prophet and spokesman for His heavenly Father, reflects on this situation in verse 4: “A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.” This statement should be understood not as an inevitable rule, but as a proverb which laments the way things often work out. And the way things often work out is that a hometown often rejects the man among them who is lifted up above the level of

mediocrity to become a holy prophet of Almighty God. All too often a family and extended family often reject the family member who is delivered from the mundane and is set apart as a mighty man of God. People don't want 'one of their own' to become a 'man on fire' who comes to represent the blazing holiness of God in their midst. 'Go away,' they say, 'and leave us alone in the comfort of our familiar and foolish ways.' The problem, let's be clear, is not cultural or sociological; the problem is spiritual. If God blesses you by raising up a prophet in your midst, and you reject that prophet, your fundamental problem is not with the prophet, but with God. The real problem is not your familiarity with the ordinary-man-turned-prophet; your real problem is your unfamiliarity with the holiness and saving power of God. Therefore you push away the grace that could have been yours, and you remain on the outside of God's kingdom of peace.

The Tragedy of Unbelief

As we look at verses 2-6, we are getting a portrait of unbelief. Remember, we enter into the riches of God's kingdom of grace through faith – not by trying, but by trusting. Remember what we learned so far in Mark's Gospel:

- "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." (Mark 1:15)
- "And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."" (Mark 2:5)
- "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40)
- "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease." (Mark 5:34)
- "Do not fear, only believe." (Mark 5:36)

The tragedy in Nazareth is that the people there did not believe. Verse 6 says: "And he marveled because of their unbelief." (Mark 6:6) Throughout Chapters 4-6, people are marveling at Jesus: He commands the wind and the sea, He frees a man from a legion of unclean spirits, He raises a little girl from the dead, He teaches with wisdom and authority. Now we are invited to marvel at what Jesus marvels at. What does Jesus marvel at? "[Their] unbelief." God's kingdom was in

their midst. More than that, God's King was standing in their presence, and God's words were flowing from His lips. If we could speak in physical terms, the signposts of God's grace were all around them. But in spiritual terms, the people were as lost as a demon-possessed man "[living] among the tombs" (Mark 5:3). They didn't have "ears to hear" (Mark 4:9, 23). Their heart was not good soil. Because of their unbelief they could not perceive and understand the mercy of the Messiah, who had taken thought to visit their little town. They were blind to His glory. Instead of welcoming Him, they critiqued Him. Instead of receiving His visit as a tremendous privilege, "they took offense at him". Instead of honoring Him, they rejected Him. Instead of taking refuge in Him, they wanted to do to Him what the demons had done to the pigs. And the Savior marveled that these precious image-bearers of God should have minds so dark and hearts so dead.

To such people, Jesus does not reveal the tokens of His glory and power: "And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them." (v. 5) Jesus' healing ministry in Nazareth was underwhelming precisely because the spiritual temperature of the town was so cold. For His part, He could have healed the whole town. His power is not dependent on us. But Jesus didn't come to put on a miracle show for people who don't want Him around. Further, the purpose of miracles is *not* to change people's hearts. If people don't have a heart to hear and believe and love the teaching that Jesus brings, then we need to understand that healings and miracles won't fix it.

Nazareth stands as a visible reminder that physical proximity to Jesus is no substitute for a living faith in Jesus. Those who are outwardly close to Jesus may inwardly be worlds apart from Him. And those who have received great advantages may squander their inheritance and prove to be one of the most spiritually comatose communities on the planet. For now, Nazareth is a closed door – and it is time to preach the gospel in other villages: "And he went about among the villages teaching." (v. 6)

JESUS DEPLOYS HIS TEAM

So as the door closes in Nazareth, Jesus turns elsewhere. And what we see Jesus doing in verses 6-13 is advancing His mission to other places. First, Jesus Himself goes "among the villages teaching" (v. 6). Second, Jesus sends out the apostles "two by two" (v. 7) – and this receives significant attention in verses 7-13. As I said earlier, Jesus' intention for His apostles was to "send them out to preach and

have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14-15) – in other words, His intention was to authorize them to do the very things that He Himself was doing.

Authority

The issue of authority and authorization is very important. Jesus has authority from the Father to proclaim the gospel. The Father bestowed His Spirit upon His beloved Son for the express purpose of empowering Him to declare the good news and demonstrate its power. Jesus is the Authorized One – and as such, He has the authority to authorize others to participate in His work. He also has the authority to prohibit others from preaching about Him and His works: He “would not permit the demons to speak” (Mark 1:34) and “strictly ordered them not to make him known” (Mark 3:12); He told the leper that He had cleansed to “say nothing to anyone” (Mark 1:44) and “he strictly charged” the parents whose daughter He brought back to life “that no one should know” what had happened (Mark 5:43). On the other hand, He gave the green light to the demon-possessed man that He had delivered: “Go home to your friends and tell them how much the Lord has done for you” (Mark 5:19). Jesus has authority to authorize or not authorize others to speak on His behalf.

As it happens, we live in a 21st western world that doesn’t like to think in terms of authority. We prefer to think in terms of freedom from authority, freedom from constraints, freedom from guardrails, freedom from hierarchy and chain of command. But as Christians who believe and trust the Bible, we understand that authority and authority structures are a good part of the good world that God made. And at the most basic level, human beings are under the authority of the Lord. To be faithful and healthy human beings, we must embrace the blessedness of living under the authority of the Lord, who leverages His authority for the good of those who trust Him. The only alternative is to suffer the cursedness of rebelling against the Lord, who will bring down judgment upon the heads of the proud. As we strive to live and serve under the Lord’s authority, pay attention to several lessons from verses 7-13.

Lesson #1: He Sends Us

First, when the Lord sends His disciples on mission, it is He who sends them. As we look at verses 7-13, we need to understand that the Lord is authorizing His chosen representatives to participate in His work: “And he called the twelve and began to send them out” (v. 7). The apostles – and all true disciples – are not self-

appointed, self-made, self-starting entrepreneurs. It is the Lord's business to send, it is the disciple's business to obey and go.

Lesson #2: He Puts Us on a Team

Second, when the Lord sends His disciples on mission, He typically sends them as a team of at least two: "he... began to send them out two by two" (v. 7). "[Two] by two" is not a fixed rule, but it reflects the consistent New Testament principle of missionary teams (e.g., Peter and John; Paul and Barnabas; Paul, Silas, and Timothy). In so many ways, "[two] are better than one" (Ecclesiastes 4:9)! Two teammates can encourage and support one another.[2] And two teammates also meet the biblical criteria for establishing true testimony on the basis of at least two witnesses (see, for example, Deuteronomy 17:6 and Matthew 18:16, and relate the principle to the testimony envisioned in Mark 6:11).[3]

Lesson #3: He Grants Us His Authority

Third, when the Lord sends His disciples on mission, He furnishes them with authority: "and [He] gave them authority over the unclean spirits." Jesus has the authority to "[command] even the unclean spirits, and they obey him" (Mark 1:27), but mere men do not have this authority. But the Lord conveys His authority to His chosen representatives so that, in His name and power, they can do what He does. The Lord's sending out of the apostles also implies the authority to preach the gospel (which they do, according to verse 12) and the authority to heal the sick (which they do, according to verse 13).

Lesson #4: We Must Trust the Father

Fourth, when the Lord sends His disciples on mission, He calls them to trust the Father for their daily needs. That is the principle that undergirds the specific instruction of verse 8: "He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in their belts – but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics." On one level, He is telling them to travel light. Don't weigh yourself down with a bag or an extra tunic. Take the clothes on your back and a staff in your hand, and no more! But on a deeper level, He is telling them to trust the Father: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). Don't take bread – trust the Father to supply it. Don't take money – trust the Father to give you what is needful.

As the passage continues, it becomes evident that disciples must trust the Father to supply their needs *through other people*. Look at verse 10: “And he said to them, “Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.”” (v. 10) The idea here is that as each two-man team travels from place to place, they are going to be dependent on the generous hospitality of others (these people are also known as people of peace). You go to the village, find a person of peace who is favorable to your work and opens up their home to you, and let that person furnish you with room and board while you minister in that village. Make that house your base of operations as long as you minister in that village. That’s what Lydia did for Paul and Silas in Philippi.

As we are following Jesus on mission, we also must trust the Father to supply our needs *through other people*. Of course, the Father is fully capable of ordaining the ravens to bring us food – as He did for the prophet Elijah. But that is the exception, not the rule. The general rule is that God will ordinarily supply your needs – needs that exceed your own resources – through the generosity of others. This requires not only patience in trusting the Father, but also humility in letting others serve you on the Father’s behalf.

Verses 8-10 also show us that trusting the Father to supply our needs through other people also includes *trusting the Father to providentially and purposefully order our comings and goings*. As you think about a two-man apostolic team going to a village or town, there are so many practical questions that arise: when will they arrive (what day and what hour?), where specifically will they go to meet the person of peace who proves to be hospitable, how will the conversation get started, how will they recognize the person of peace, and will the person of peace be the first person they meet or the tenth? Here’s the point: they can’t script it! They don’t know in advance how all the details will unfold. Their job is to trust the Father to wisely arrange the ins and outs of their day, to purposefully order their delays and interruptions, and to appoint the right meetings with the right people at the right time. So the lesson of verses 8-10 is: *trust the Father to order your steps moment by moment, and trust Him to supply your needs through other people*. Such trust will also lead to contentment with the Father’s provision. After the host has opened up his or her home to you, you are to “stay there” for the duration of your ministry in that town and *not seek better or more comfortable accommodations from another wealthier host*. Trust the Father, and stay a while.

Without trust, you might as well stay at home, lest you spread the contagion of fear. “Do not fear, only believe” (Mark 5:36) is the Lord’s will for us in all circumstances!

Lesson #5: We Must Convey the Utter Seriousness of Disobedience

Fifth, when the Lord sends His disciples on mission, He tells them that they must be ready to convey to others the utter seriousness of disobedience. While we must be compassionate, we must not allow compassion to devolve into sentimentality. Because the stakes are so high, there are occasions when we must draw a clear line – there are times when we must express the reality of God’s judgment to the stubborn-hearted. Look at verse 11: “And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”

Not receiving the Lord’s ambassadors is tantamount to not receiving the Lord. Not listening to the Lord’s commissioned preachers is equivalent to not listening to the Lord Himself. Whenever a group of people rejects the Lord *and* rejects the Lord’s words *and* rejects the Lord’s kingdom of grace, that group of people remains under the righteous judgment of God. And the Lord tells His apostles that if they encounter that situation where a particular town rejects their ministry, then they must testify “against them”. Such a town has in a sense judged itself to be unworthy of eternal life, and so – symbolically speaking – the ground of that place is cursed. So, since beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news (Isaiah 52:7), the apostles should not let that town’s accursed dirt and accursed dust remain on their lovely feet. By “[shaking] off the dust that is on their feet”, the apostles are essentially saying: you are hereby forewarned that unless you repent, all of you – the entire town right down to the very ground – all of you will perish.

As we minister God’s Word and God’s grace to others, there are times when we must solemnly warn those who refuse to be instructed. We haven’t come to play games. We haven’t come to beat around the bush. We haven’t come to deceive people about their peril. God is holy, and we sinners are exceedingly sinful. And God has appointed a day on which His Son will judge the world according to His perfect standard of righteousness – and that day will not go well for the person who has spent his or her life belittling and neglecting the Lord of glory. Scripture says: “But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the

sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.” (Revelation 21:8) Our ministry must reflect the weightiness of what is actually at stake: everlasting life for those who receive the Lord, and everlasting misery for those who reject Him.

Gospel Ministry Requires Grace, Courage, and Strength

So what we see here – and what the disciples have been learning all along – is that gospel ministry is not for the faint of heart. Just think about what the disciples have already learned about the nature of ministry to a broken world.

The disciples have learned that gospel ministry involves a head-on collision with the satanic powers of darkness. Jesus goes into the Capernaum synagogue and “a man with an unclean spirit” (Mark 1:23) cries out. Jesus goes into “the country of the Gerasenes” (Mark 5:1) and “a man with an unclean spirit” emerges from the cemetery (Mark 5:2). You will need spiritual power to meet this challenge.

The disciples have learned that gospel ministry is a ministry among the hurting and the dying. Jesus’ ministry didn’t take place in a refined gated community where everyone is sparkly on the outside. To be sure, such a place requires the gospel as much as any other place, but Jesus’ ministry took place at the point of profound tangible need. It is the demon-possessed, the disease-ridden, and the handicapped who flocked to Jesus. You will need a patient and tender heart to persevere.

The disciples have learned that the gospel is for all kinds of people, but usually it is the cultural nobodies who receive it and the religious somebodies who reject it. So get ready for an unconventional ministry to the spiritual underclass: unclean lepers, despised tax collectors, anti-social demoniacs, and chronically ill people. And yet, everyone is welcome – including ordinary fishermen and Jairus the synagogue ruler. But most often the religious and political bigwigs refuse to come. You will need to remember that you are nothing special without Jesus, and then you will be able to welcome all the other nobodies who trust Jesus as their only hope.

The disciples have learned that gospel ministry is often rejected. Many people respond to the gospel dismissively, superficially, or halfheartedly, and never get saved. Some places respond to Jesus the way that “the country of the Gerasenes”

responded – by “[begging] Jesus to depart from their region” (Mark 5:17). Some places respond to Jesus the way that Nazareth responded – by “[taking] offense at him” (Mark 6:3) and dishonoring Him. Indeed, some groups of people “will not receive you and they will not listen to you” (v. 11). You will need some thick skin over that tender heart!

And the disciples have learned that gospel ministry is dangerous. John the Baptist was already in prison (Mark 1:14). The Pharisees and the Herodians were already plotting against Jesus (Mark 3:6). In his explanation of the Parable of the Four Soils, Jesus mentioned something about “tribulation or persecution [arising] on account of the word” (Mark 4:17). And on their missionary journey across the Sea of Galilee, they lost their spiritual equilibrium amid the fierceness of the storm (Mark 4:35-41). Further, entering into combat with demons will prove too much for you unless you are clothed in the power of Christ. You must remain steadfast in trusting your heavenly Father, or the dangers will overwhelm you.

That was the real world into which the Lord sent His apostles. And as He sent them, so they obeyed: “So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.” (v. 12-13) They *declared* the gospel and *demonstrated* its power.

Of course, the proclamation of the Word was and is primary. People should listen to the Word (v. 11) and, in light of this good news about God’s kingdom, they “should repent” (v. 12) – that is, flee from sin and get their lives re-aligned with the ways of the Lord. The heart of gospel ministry is proclaiming the sacrificial death and victorious resurrection of our Lord, so that people might “repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15), receive forgiveness (Mark 2:1-12), and become part of Jesus’ forever family (Mark 3:31-35).

A PORTRAIT OF GOSPEL MINISTRY

So what Mark’s Gospel has done, even in these early chapters, is given us this portrait of gospel ministry: collision with the powers of darkness, amid so many hurting and dying people, full of perils all around, and your message will sometimes be rejected, especially by the cultural and religious insiders. Even so, your message is the only death-defeating, demon-toppling, sin-forgiving, eternal-life-giving message in the universe: proclaim it and, like seed in the soil or like

yeast in the dough, expect it to do its work, especially among the cultural and religious outsiders. And watch the Lord grow His church.

This is gospel ministry – not easy, not safe, not manageable, but good, commissioned by Christ, and predestined by God to triumph. The missionary character of verses 7-13 should be reflected in what we do as South Paris Baptist Church, as we also go forth in Christ’s name and make new disciples in the Oxford Hills. If you are meeting sometime this week with your Missional Home Group, or with your midweek Bible Study, or with your Ministry Team, ask each other:

What would it look like for us to go out and proclaim that people should repent? What is the next step that we should take? How can we support each other in this crucial task?

Don’t give yourself an out because you’re not a capital-A Apostle. We’re not capital-A Apostles, but the Apostles are presented as model disciples, and we are disciples who should follow in their steps. So let the Lord’s commission to them nudge you in the direction of faithfulness:

Christians, go and do what Jesus has sent you to do. Operate in His authority and dismantle the darkness; stick close to your teammates; travel light and trust the Father to provide; be on the look-out for God-appointed friends who will help you; and as you preach the gospel, keep reminding people that the stakes are high, and the consequences are eternal. Be diligent to “[proclaim] that people should repent” (v. 12), for unless they repent they will surely perish.

In verse 6, Jesus “marveled because of [his hometown’s] unbelief.” How wonderful it would be if, before too long, we were marveling because an awakening of repentance had swept through an entire town, like life from the dead!

Let us pray.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001: p. 192. Witherington's comment (which I am about to quote) influenced my thinking:

“Notice that they neither dispute that he has wisdom or that he performs mighty works; they are just dumbfounded that it comes from a hometown boy like Jesus. More than just a matter of familiarity breeding contempt, this comes from the ancient mentality that geographical and heredity origins determine who a person is and what his capacities will always be. They see Jesus as someone who is not merely exceeding expectations but rather is overreaching.” (p. 192)

[2] See Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Vol. 2)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017: p. 137

[3] On the function of “two by two” in relation to bearing witness, see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Mark (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries Vol. 2)*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017: p. 137 ; and William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark (The New International Commentary on the New Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974: p. 207.

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