

Gospel of Mark Chapter 6

1. Chapter 6 is a bunch of stories containing miracles, and truthfully, it's about a lack of faith despite the miracles. My title therefore is, "Beware of the dangers of a lack of faith". The key to reading these stories is for us to grasp the full power of Jesus and how that affects our lives as believers. A lack of faith limits what God is willing to do in our lives. That is a key point of this lesson.
 - a) The chapter opens with a story of Jesus visiting his hometown. These people knew Jesus since His childhood. Essentially, Jesus would not do much in this town, due to their lack of faith. The lesson here is a lack of faith can limit what God is willing to do in our lives.
 - b) The next thing in this chapter is the story of how John the Baptist was killed. That story is mainly about a king named Herod who ruled over the Sea of Galilee area under the Roman Empire. This story explains why John was put in jail and the fact he died a martyr's death. The story is a true soap opera of how the king's wife and daughter conspired against that king and got him to kill John the Baptist to alleviate their guilt.
 - i) A key point of that story is that one can feel guilty about one's sins and then instead of repenting, one can eliminate those who tell us to repent.
 - c) Next is the story of Jesus miraculously feeding 5,000 men. The story ends with a "lack of faith" as the disciples did not understand the purpose of the miracle as it affects their life.
 - d) Next, we get the story of Jesus walking on the sea and the disciples (to put it simply), didn't believe it was Jesus and thought He was a ghost. Again, we have a situation of a lack of faith in who is Jesus and what He is capable of doing.
 - e) The chapter ends on a positive note of Jesus performing more miracles. I'll explain why this last story is there when I get to those verses.
2. OK John, we get a bunch of stories that include miracles and these stories all have some elements of non-belief in Jesus. What does that have to do with you and me?
 - a) It teaches us that miracles are not enough to get people to change their lifestyles. Miracles can get people to have gratitude for a short time. However, real change has to come from seeking God and the desire to please Him with our lives. That is "repentance". If people aren't willing to change their lives, no visible miracle sign will make a difference in the long run.
 - b) Next, it should remind us as Christians, to accept the fact that some people will change and some will not. Only God knows who is saved and who is not so we should keep on being a witness to all people.
 - c) Consider this: Have you ever had doubts in your own faith and thought, "If I just had a miracle right now, I would believe in God"? A similar thought is: "If this person would just to see a great miracle right now, I know they would change for God". In both cases, miracles only, at best get us grateful to God for a short time span. True change has to come from within. God has to change people's hearts to repent and follow Him.
 - d) A summary of this chapter is we see examples of "lack of faith" and the consequences of that lack of faith. The idea for us is to complete these situations and how they affect our concept of who Jesus is, and how that concept affects our "walk" with Him.
3. Chapter 6, Verse 1: Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples.
 - a) OK, remind me again, where is the "there" that Jesus left?
 - i) You have to go back to Verse 21 of the previous chapter. In Chapter 5 Jesus traveled by boat across the Sea of Galilee (a freshwater lake) to "Gentile Country" on the east side of the lake. In the latter part of the chapter, Jesus traveled again by boat, to the west side of the lake. The spot where Jesus actually landed is not mentioned in Chapter 5, but we do know that wherever it is, it is a "Jewish area" based on the reactions and comments made by the people Jesus encountered there.

- b) Next we read here in Verse 1 that Jesus went back to his hometown. So where is that?
 - i) Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but if you read the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus was raised in a town near the Sea of Galilee, called Nazareth. The reason Jesus is called "Jesus of Nazareth" in the Gospel stories is that the name of the town He is from.
 - ii) The point of Verse 1 is that wherever Jesus was in Chapter 5, he was probably a relatively short distance from his hometown. He went there with his disciples.
- 4. Verse 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!
 - a) On the 7th day of the week, which we call Saturday, Jesus taught in a synagogue in his hometown. Understand that it was not the local rabbi who said, "I'm going to pass on my sermon today, because Jesus is here". ☺ The way a synagogue service works is that after the normal service, whoever wants to speak is welcome to get up and speak. Jesus went up and taught at this point.
 - b) Now the questions about Jesus start to pop up in this town. One has to remember that this town has seen Jesus grow up from childhood to adulthood. In all of that time, (prior to being baptized by John the Baptist), Jesus probably never did a miracle in town nor did he ever preach at the local synagogue.
 - c) Put yourself in the shoes of the local townspeople. They watched Jesus grow up. They probably had no previous knowledge that he could be the Messiah. It is also possible that since Jesus lead an ordinary life until the time He was ordained to start His ministry, the town refused to believe the stories that Mary and Joseph had about Jesus' childhood.
 - d) One can sort of understand how this town could wonder how Jesus got such biblical wisdom and the power to do miracles. They watched Jesus grow up and never saw Him study under the local rabbi's.
- 5. Verse 3: Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.
 - a) Verse 3: The townsfolk not only knew Jesus, but also knew His (half) siblings as well.
 - b) After Jesus was born, Mary and Joseph didn't just stop and stare with glassy eyes at Jesus all day. ☺ They went on to have a big family. This verse says that Jesus had four half-brothers and at least two half sisters. They were the other children of Joseph and Mary.
 - c) This leads to a quick discussion about "Mary worship". There are factions within the world of Christianity that elevate Mary to a "higher level" and claim she was a virgin all of her life. This verse counters that false idea.
 - i) There are some Roman Catholic and Orthodox (as in Greek Orthodox) scholars that argue that these other siblings are the children of Joseph prior to Jesus being born. When Joseph married Mary, these other children became hers by adoption.
 - ii) The problem with that argument is there is no mention of the other children in the story surrounding Jesus birth at Bethlehem. If there were "six others" at Jesus' birth, it would have been mentioned in those stories. Since they were sons of Joseph, they would be required to travel to Bethlehem as well. In short, the argument that they were Joseph's sons from a previous marriage doesn't work.
 - iii) So is Mary special or not? She is special in that she was chosen to be the mother of the God of the Universe for His time on earth. It does not make her a deity, but it does make her special and to be appreciated as such.
 - d) Getting back to the townsfolk of Nazareth, they have watched Jesus grow up. Jesus was around thirty when he started His ministry. This town was saying in effect, "We've watched Him grow up and now you expect us to believe that He is something special?"
 - e) There is a subtle put-down in Verse 3. The Verse says, "Isn't this Mary's son?" In the Jewish culture, you are always referred to as the son of the father. Because Jesus' fatherhood is questioned, he is called the "Son of Mary". It is a deliberate insult.

6. Verse 4: Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."
 - a) Jesus states a principal here that is true throughout history. Jesus says that a prophet is not honored in his hometown. At this point, the town Jesus grew up in, did not believe He was sent of God and his own brothers didn't believe it either. (See John 7:5.)
 - b) I have found this principal to be true in my own life. I have three brothers, none of whom read these studies or have any serious interest in learning more about Jesus. As much as I "preach" in these bible studies and stand up for Jesus in other situations, I'm pretty quiet around my siblings when it comes to my relationship with God.
 - i) I thought about it this way, "If Jesus could not convince His own family members that He is God, why should I expect to do any better with my own siblings"?
 - c) My point here is to teach the difficulty of sharing with one's own family members about God. I do pray for others to come in and make a spiritual difference in their lives.
 - d) Getting back to our lesson theme, the point here is one of the reasons for a lack of faith is too much familiarity with the preacher. That is principal Jesus is teaching.
 - e) I once heard a pastor who complained that a guest speaker gave a sermon fairly similar to the one he gave not long earlier. The congregation later thanked that guest speaker for the points he made. The regular pastor then remembered Jesus' point about not being successful in one's hometown. The regular pastor then stopped to thank God that people did get the message and stopped worrying about the issue of "through whom" the message did come. (This was taken from comments on this verse by Ray Steadman.)
7. Verse 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.
 - a) Here we finish the story of Jesus "failing to do much" in His hometown. The text says that Jesus could not do a lot of miracles here except cure some sick people.
 - b) So, does this mean that Jesus' power is limited only to those who believed in Him? That's not what the text means. The issue is about our own faith. God will not violate our free will. We have to come to Him with even the smallest amount of faith in Jesus. He can then work on our faith to draw us closer to Him.
 - i) In Jesus hometown, there were some sick people. These sick people still came to Jesus in the hopes He could do something. Jesus then responded to that small amount of faith that some people did have in Him.
 - c) So if Jesus knew he could not do much in his hometown, why try?
 - i) Part of it is to show us Christians the limits of working in one's hometown.
 - ii) So does that mean if God calls us to be a pastor or teacher or leader, we have to change towns? It is a possibility to consider. If Jesus was rejected by those of His hometown, that same possibility can happen to us. It doesn't mean we shouldn't try preaching to our relatives. It means we should not expect much of a reaction to a group of people who have "seen us in diapers".
8. Verse 6 (cont.): 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 spirits.
 - a) At this point, Jesus stopped working in his hometown and started going from one place to another preaching the Gospel Message and teaching that people must turn to Him for salvation. Verse 7 then says that Jesus was going to preach by sending His disciples in pairs ahead of Him to teach others about Him and to teach of "repentance" of sins.
 - b) Verse 7 also says that the disciples would have the power to cast evil spirits out of people.
 - c) First, lets talk about "pairs". If Jesus wanted to spread the word about Him to as many as possible, wouldn't it be better to send out the 12 disciples as individuals to more towns?
 - i) In the Jewish culture, in order for something to be accepted as true, it required two people to be in agreement. In other words, two people claiming Jesus is the Messiah carries more weight than a single person.

- d) So why were the disciples given power over evil spirits? In the same way Jesus used miracles to validate who He was, Jesus gave the disciples special power so others would be more willing to listen to them and accept the message about repentance of their sins.
 - e) OK, does this mean that we as Christians are to go from place to place today in pairs, preaching Jesus and looking for demons to cast out? Not exactly.
 - i) First of all, this is a specific mission for a specific group of disciples. The New Testament does not teach for all Christians to go into the world in pairs and do exactly what Jesus commanded these twelve to do on this mission trip.
 - ii) What Christians are called to do is to be a witness for Christ. For some of us, that does mean to go to distant places. For most of us, it is to be a witness for Jesus just where we are. There is a classic Christian line that goes, "Unless God leads you elsewhere, bloom where you are planted and plant where you bloom".
 - iii) As far as demons, Christians are given the gift of casting out demons. Some people have a special gift for this more than others, but I believe any Christian can call upon the name of Jesus to eliminate demons.
 - iv) Jesus does give Christians special powers, but not with the goal of showing off, but the goal is to lead others to Christ or helping others grow in their faith.
 - v) Also remember that performing miracles are up to God and not up to us. If God chooses to do a miracle at any given time, it is up to Him and not up to us.
 - f) In summary, the point is we too are called to be witnesses for Jesus. We are not specifically called to go in pairs like this group, but there are similarities between what Jesus is calling the 12 disciples to do and what God calls all Christians to do.
 - g) Meanwhile, there are more instructions for the disciples before they hit the road. ☺
9. Verse 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."
- a) The essential idea is that when the disciples were to travel from one place to another, they were to just take simple clothing and no provisions for one's journey. If someone in a town welcomes them, they should stay there and eat what was given to them without complaining. They should then stay there until they are ready to move on. If a town does not welcome them, they are to shake the dust off of their feet, as a symbolic act of what will happen to them for rejecting Jesus.
 - b) Jesus told them to "wear sandals but not an extra tunic". Sandals are a basic and comfortable form of footwear for that climate. A tunic is an undergarment. Wealthier people carried more than one tunic as a change of clothing.
 - c) Jesus did say to carry a staff, which is a walking stick. That stick is an aid for long distance walking and it helps to "shoe away" animals.
 - d) So now that we get the idea that Jesus sent his disciples out ahead of him in pairs without a lot of provisions, what does that mean for us? Do we do likewise? No, in the sense that this is a temporary mission and Jesus will give them different instructions before facing persecution after the resurrection. If that is true, what are we to get from this passage?
 - i) The short answer is if we trust that Jesus provides for the disciples in this mission trip, then we should trust that Jesus is watching out for us in our lives and will guide us and provide for us as we live to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) As Christians it is worth the effort to tell others about Jesus, as some will change and others will reject our message. Yes, many will reject the message, but there are some will accept our message.
 - iii) God does call Christians to be missionaries, but for those who do, we are not called to follow the exact model of these last four verses. How we prepare for that missionary trip should be relevant to the group we are witnessing to.

10. Verse 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.
- a) These two verses give the results of that mission trip. We don't know how far they traveled or for how long they traveled. We don't even know how many people received their message. All we know is that the disciples did go out in pairs and preached that people should repent like Jesus asked them to do.
 - b) What does "repent" mean? The actual meaning is about changing one's lifestyle to a way that is pleasing to God. It means that people should primarily live to please God in all that they do. It means that one should change their way of living in that one's primary concern is whether or not is one pleasing to God with their lives. It's about caring about pleasing God with whatever we are doing with our lives.
 - c) Along with that message, the disciples drove out demons and healed the sick. Remember that the purpose of miracles here are to validate the messengers. People could ask the disciples, "How do I know you are sent by God to preach this message?" The answer is the miracles were performed as validation of their power.
 - d) Let me explain "anointing sick people with oil". In that culture, pouring oil on someone's head is symbolic of the spirit of God working in their life. Oil was thought of as soothing relief to whatever ails a person.
 - i) So does that mean I can pour oil on somebody and heal them of any disease? It is not the oil itself that does the healing, but the power of God working in our lives. Think of "pouring oil" as us praying over someone. Again, prayer is up to God in the sense we are asking for His will to be done and not ours.
 - ii) The New Testament does call for the elders of the church to pray over the sick and anoint them with oil. (See James 5:14 on this point.) That doesn't mean we ignore modern medicine. It just means we seek God and ask Him to intervene in the sicknesses that occur among Christian believers.
 - iii) For what it is worth, such healing miracles are more common in areas of the world where modern medicine is not available. God has a greater opportunity to work where "modern medicine" is not available as the sole source of healing.
 - e) This leads me back to the text. The disciples were successful as Jesus' "front-men". Does that mean we go and do likewise? The answer is "yes" in the sense that God calls all Christians to preach the Good News of Jesus whenever the opportunity arises. The answer is "yes" in that God does work miracles through people. The answer is "no" in that God does not specifically call all Christians to go out in pairs and do exactly what the disciples did on this trip.
 - i) So do we do likewise or not? The answer is to ask God what are we specifically called to do as Christians just for this moment in time. The other thing to learn is that "Where God leads, God provides". God never leads us on any mission in which He won't have a way of providing for us during that sort of mission.
11. Verse 14: King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him."
- a) The story of the disciples "field trip" suddenly gets interrupted for half a chapter so Mark can now tell the story of King Herod and the death of John the Baptist.
 - b) Lets start with the facts given in this verse. It says that King Herod heard about the miracles that Jesus did. King Herod's first thought about Jesus was that John the Baptist was raised from the dead and that is why these miracles are working in Jesus.
 - c) In order to understand that statement by King Herod, and what it means, it would be helpful here to give some historical background on King Herod. The story in Mark's Gospel will also give further details, but having some actual historical background will make the next set of verses easier to understand.

- d) To understand the story of King Herod, first know that there is more than one "Herod" in the bible. The Herod's were a family that ruled over the (Sea of) Galilee area under the Roman Government. The father of the Herod mentioned here is the one that killed the babies in Bethlehem. The book of Acts, Chapter 12 mentions a different Herod than the one discussed here in the Gospel of Mark.
 - i) This Herod mentioned here in Mark's Gospel had all sorts of problems. This Herod was given in marriage to a princess of another country. However, Herod was in love with his brother's wife. Therefore, Herod left his "assigned" wife and married his brother's wife. The epilogue of this Herod is that he was so wicked, even the Roman government kicked him out of office and he lived out his final years in exile in what is today Spain. (The source is non-biblical historical records.)
 - e) With that background understood, know that this Herod was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. John preached to Herod about how it was wrong to take his brother's wife. In Verse 14, all we know so far is that King Herod felt guilty about killing John and the king was saying that either literally or "figuratively", John the Baptist rose from the dead and John the Baptist's power was working through Jesus.
12. Verse 15: Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."
- a) In contrast to King Herod, other people living in that area that thought Jesus was the reincarnation of Elijah. That man Elijah was a bible prophet and the Old Testament predicted that Elijah would return before the Messiah comes. (See Malachi 4:5.)
 - i) Other people were saying that Jesus was a new prophet of God. Know that there have not been any prophets in Israel for about 400 years. That is why some were saying Jesus is a prophet of God like those of "long ago".
 - b) The point of this verse is that there were lots of rumors and speculation going on in that area about just who Jesus is. So why mention that fact?
 - i) For starters, it teaches us that word about Jesus was getting around and there was lots of speculation going on about who Jesus really was.
 - ii) The focus of this section of the chapter is on King Herod. Mark the Gospel writer wants us to know that King Herod thought that Jesus was John the Baptist reincarnated. Mark also wants us to know that not everyone had that same thought as Herod and others had different theories on Jesus at this point.
 - c) The next fourteen verses now tell the story of this King Herod and why he had John the Baptist killed. So why tell this story? For starters, it tells us whatever happened to John the Baptist and it teaches us how Jesus and the disciples reacted to that story.
 - d) With that said, its time to explain the story of King Herod and what he did to John.
13. Verse 16: But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"
- a) A point here is that King Herod didn't believe any of the other rumors floating around about Jesus. He was personally convinced that Jesus was somehow John the Baptist being reincarnated and that John's power was working through Jesus. We will learn that King Herod understood that John the Baptist was an honorable man of God.
 - b) Herod had some internal guilt about taking his brother's wife and Herod "internalized" that guilt to think that Jesus somehow had the "spirit of John" inside of Him.
 - c) God gives all of us the conscious to know the sins we are committing is wrong. It causes us to realize our lives are displeasing to God. Herod thought that by John being "resurrected", God is staying on his case about what he did wrong.
 - d) We will discover this guilt did not get Herod to change his lifestyle. That describes much of the world that refuses to repent to God. They understand what they are doing is wrong, but don't want to change their lifestyle.
 - e) Meanwhile, its time for more details about the story of King Herod. ☺

14. Verse 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; yet he liked to listen to him.
- a) Here we have the text giving us the details of what I have already stated. It shows that I have jumped ahead of the text in explaining what this means. ☺
 - b) A key point here is that Herod has had past encounters with John the Baptist prior to Herod arresting John. It may have been direct contacts or it may have been people reporting what John had said to Herod.
 - c) John the Baptist said to Herod that it is not "lawful" to have his brother's wife. Know that Herod was not a Jew, but an Edomite. My point here is God's laws about a man not taking another man's wife is not limited to Jewish people. John the Baptist is saying it is wrong for any man to have his brother's wife.
 - i) If nothing else, this teaches us that some of God's laws are universal and some are specifically for the Jewish nation. John did not expect King Herod to live like a Jew, but John did expect Herod to follow God's "universal laws" such as not stealing, and cheating, which would including cheating on one's wife.
 - d) Herod didn't like John preaching against him, so he had John put in prison to shut him up. At the same time Herod didn't have John killed because Herod knew John was right. The end of verse 20 says that King Herod liked to listen to John preach. In other words, Herod felt guilty enough to go hear John preach in prison, but did not let that guilt bother him enough to release Herod from prison.
 - e) Meanwhile, Herod wasn't the only one who had to deal with the guilt of John's preaching. Herod's new wife "Herodias" also didn't like the fact that John was preaching against their marriage. She didn't have the power to have the man killed so she just "nursed a grudge".
 - f) Time for a quick interruption: What does any of this have to do with the Gospel of Mark and learning about Jesus? Part of the answer is to teach us whatever happened to John the Baptist and why he was killed by Herod. Another reason is to teach us what happens when we ignore the "guilt" that God places inside of us for living a sinful life and refusing to repent of those sins.
 - i) With that understood, we can go back to the story of King Herod.
15. Verse 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.
- a) Remember that in Verse 15 it said that King Herod's wife (Herodias) held a grudge against John the Baptist and looked for an opportunity to have John killed. That opportunity came at a banquet given by King Herod on his birthday for the leading people under King Herod's rule.
 - b) Verse 22 mentions that King Herod and his wife had a daughter. Her name is not given in this Gospel. The story mentions that this daughter danced for King Herod and his dinner guests and that dance pleased King Herod.
 - c) First, a little bit about the dancing. I'm guessing that this banquet already had some professional entertainment that may have even included dancers. It is one thing to bring in a slave girl to dance for the guests. It is another to have the king's daughter brought in to entertain the guests. My point is the daughter should have been "above this" and it was not culturally accepted to have a wife or daughter dance for the guests.

- d) Also understand that this daughter was not five years old. She was old enough that the dancing was done in a sexual manner and designed to sexually entice the king.
 - i) Why did this girl do the dance? Probably because her mother asked her to do it. Why did her mother ask her daughter to do this? Most likely because the mom understand the sexual weakness of King Herod. She understood that King Herod was sexually turned on by this. The point is Herod's wife understood Herod's weakness, and used it against him in order to get her wish of having John killed.
 - ii) The point for you and me is if we don't confess our sins to God and look to Him to overcome our sins, I guarantee you that there are forces out there that also know our "weaknesses" and will use them against us to turn us further from God.
- e) Meanwhile, Herodias' daughter is still dancing and her father is turned on by this. ☺
- 16. Verse 22 (cont.): 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."
 - a) The king understood that what the girl did was "not lawful" and it enticed the king so much, he was willing to make a foolish vow in front of the dinner guests.
 - b) In a sense, the king offered his daughter a "blank check" to ask for whatever she wanted.
 - c) Why did Herod specify half the kingdom? I suspect he knew that his wife was behind this and it is saying in effect, "Half of mine is yours (the wife) honey. What can I do for you?"
- 17. Verse 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."
 - a) The daughter did not know what was her mom's full intent. All the daughter knew at this point was she was to dance at her mother's request. When her father gave the "half the kingdom" oath, the daughter then went to mom and asks in effect, "now what, mom?"
 - b) Notice mom did not ask that the Galilee area be cut in half and that she rule half the kingdom. Mom did not ask for half of the tax money or any material things. The only thing that mattered to Herod's wife (Herodias) at the moment was her anger at John the Baptist for saying that her marriage to King Herod was wrong.
 - i) Guilt will do that too you. It can "eat you up" so much that all you want to do is either make the guilt go away or eliminate the source of the guilt. That is what the mother wanted and that is what she told the daughter to ask for.
 - ii) That is why the daughter asked for the head of John the Baptist on a platter.
 - c) So why should I know all of this ancient history? Know that if we preach that people need to change from their lifestyle and turn to God, they may know deep down that we are right, but they may choose to "silence us" as opposed to changing from their lifestyle. In other words, to preach Jesus to others is a dangerous thing to one's health. Even if we are gentle in our preaching, some people would rather kill the messenger than deal with the issue. Many Christians have been killed over the centuries because people didn't want to hear what they are doing is wrong.
 - i) Does that mean we should keep our mouths shut and not preach the Gospel? Of course not. It does mean that one has to be careful and it may be necessary at times to run for our lives. It also means we have to expect negative reactions to Gospel as well as positive reactions. It does mean that what God "calls us to do" can at times be dangerous to our physical well being.
 - ii) OK, enough on that. Back to King Herod. ☺
- 18. Verse 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.

- a) Essentially, King Herod's wife "set up" the king by wanting him to make a big public vow in front of his dinner guests. His daughter then asks mom, "What do you want" and the mom replied, "Give me the head of John the Baptist on a platter."
 - i) King Herod liked to listen to John and knew that he was a righteous man. However, the king did not want to "lose face" (i.e., look bad) in front of his guests so he went along with his wife's and daughters request.
 - b) The moral of the story is to beware of our weaknesses. At the right moment and the right time, our weaknesses can and will be used against us. If Satan can figure out we have a weakness for women or drinking or "whatever", it can be used against us. The simple secret is to constantly and regularly give that weakness to God and rely on His strength to overcome our problems and issues in life.
 - c) The other moral of this story is we could be a good follower of Jesus like John the Baptist and still be killed, essentially for our beliefs. Being a Christian is not a guarantee to a long and prosperous life in this lifetime. If anything, it means we constantly have to be on our guard against danger of someone who doesn't want to be convicted of sin and using that anger against us. That doesn't mean we don't preach repentance, it just means we have to be aware of the risk it can cause to our lives. John the Baptist didn't "slow down" out of a fear of death and neither should we. At the same time, if there are ways of escape, we should not think twice about taking them.
 - d) Verse 29 ends with the footnote that the disciples of John gave his headless body a proper burial. Even if King Herod didn't have the guts to do the right thing, there were still people in Israel who knew John was innocent and did the right "legal thing" in terms of giving John a proper Jewish burial. Herod could have ordered the guards to not let anyone have the body. Out of respect of John, he let his disciples have the body. It doesn't make up for what Herod did, but it shows that many people respected John.
19. Verse 30: The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.
³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."
- a) Meanwhile, Jesus and His disciples were still going from town to town preaching a message of repentance and asking people to change their lives to serve the true God.
 - b) Notice there is no mention of what happened to John here with the disciples. Mark the Gospel writer told the story of King Herod and John the Baptist so that we the reader could know John's end. John is presently getting a great eternal reward for faithful service. He simply had to suffer in this lifetime for standing up for Jesus.
 - c) Meanwhile, the disciples had finished their short-term missionary trip of going from town to town ahead of Jesus. Now the disciples reported back to Jesus of their success.
 - d) The price the disciples paid for their success was now again, there were lots of people crowding around Jesus, to the point where Jesus and his disciples could not even rest and even enjoy a meal together.
 - i) One thing to catch throughout the gospels is Jesus is constantly teaching his disciples the importance of rest. It doesn't mean they don't or shouldn't work hard. It just means that they needed time to rest in order to have the strength to go and preach another day.
20. Verse 32: So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.
- a) The disciples successfully managed to get away by getting on a boat together and sailing to a solitary place. However, the crowd that saw them leave began to run around the lake and saw where they landed. Others probably joined this "footrace" at this time.

- b) Verse 34 said that Jesus had compassion on the crowd. Remember that the purpose of the boat trip was for Jesus to rest with the disciples. I bet when the disciples saw the crowd, they were complaining how they could not get the rest they wanted. Jesus knew the disciples needed rest, but Jesus also saw the need of this big crowd gathering to see Him.
 - c) A great lesson to learn here is that sometimes, the way to "refresh ourselves" is to be of service to someone else. Sometimes when one is "burnt out", one needs to go and be of service for other people. Such actions can often refresh us in ways we can't imagine. The disciples had to learn that lesson.
21. Verse 35: By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." ³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"
- a) By the end of the day, Jesus wanted to teach His disciples a lesson on how to be dependant upon God to deal with all our human needs, including hunger. The disciples wanted to send the crowd away so they could go and get some food. Jesus responded with "you give them something to eat". The disciples said it would take eight months of a man's wages just to have enough food for everyone there to have a little bit to eat. In other words, the disciples did not have the resources to feed this crowd and was explaining that to Jesus.
 - b) We are getting into the story of Jesus performing the miracle of feeding 5,000 people with just a few fish and a few pieces of bread. This story may be the only miracle that is told in all four gospels. (Outside of the events dealing with Jesus' death and resurrection.)
22. Verse 38: "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish."
- a) Amongst the people traveling with Jesus, there was found a total of five loaves of bread (envision "pita bread" loaves) and two cooked fish. Notice Jesus did not say to look to Him for food, but to look amongst themselves. The point here is that Jesus expects us to use whatever resources He has given us before asking for more from Him.
23. Verse 39: Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.
- a) Why did Jesus require that the men sit in groups of 50 or 100? The short answer is that it made it easier to count. The reason the disciples knew there were 5,000 men was simply to count the groups of 50 or 100. Also know that in that culture, men always sat separately from women. Therefore, if there were 5,000 men total (Verse 44), there may have been an equal or greater number of women and children there who ate separately.
 - b) This of course, is the famous miracle where Jesus multiplied the fish and loaves. We don't get the exact details of how it worked, just that it did. Somehow, the pieces of fish and bread were multiplied to the point where everyone there was stuffed. The Greek word translated "satisfied" literally means stuffed.
 - c) I have to admit I wondered where the disciples got the 12 baskets. In that culture, it was common for women to carry around baskets with whatever supplies were inside. Amongst the crowd, there were at least 12 baskets that could be used and they ended up being donated to the disciples in exchange for the food.
 - d) So what does this story mean to us? It means God can provide when "all seems hopeless" in ways we cannot imagine. God tells us to use whatever resources we have for Him (as the disciples gave their bread and fish) and somehow, God will make up the difference.

24. Verse 45: Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.
- a) Jesus still wanted his disciples to rest, so he sent them alone back on the boat. From the disciples' standpoint, Jesus was going to walk around the lake to meet them somewhere. Jesus specifies where they are to go, and that was a place called Bethsaida.
 - b) I'm guessing after just watching that miracle of the mass feeding, they were too afraid to question Jesus when He told the disciples to go on without Him in the boat.
 - c) The text mentioned Jesus took the time to pray. If Jesus Himself desired to make time to pray to God the Father, that alone is a sign that we should do likewise, no matter how busy is the situation around us.
25. Verse 47: When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." ⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down.
- a) Here was this group of (predominately) fisherman on this boat. They were rowing hard as the wind was against them as they rowed across the lake. Jesus was walking on the water and was going to walk past them, but they cried out to Him for help.
 - b) Some quick words about the miracle of walking on water: Just as Jesus has the power to defy physical laws and multiply the food, so Jesus has the power to defy the laws of gravity as we know them and walk on the water. The key is Jesus only did the will of God the Father. He didn't do the walk to show off. If anything, Jesus was going to walk right pass them and keep going to his destination.
 - i) So why mention that Jesus "was going to walk pass them"? As the disciples were straining, it naturally seemed impossible to them that Jesus could be out on the water. The disciples were not crying out to Jesus for help as they were rowing, so that is why the text mentioned, "he would have passed them."
 - ii) The disciples didn't cry out for Jesus, because they didn't believe He was really there walking on the water. The point for us is Jesus is always there willing to help us if we believe that Jesus can help in our situation.
 - c) Verse 48 mentions it was the "fourth watch". That roughly means 3am to 6am. It was dark. The disciples thought that Jesus was a ghost. That would be a natural reaction if we saw any figure walking on the water in the middle of the night.
 - d) This is also the famous passage (in Matthew and Luke's Gospel) where Peter walked on the water to meet Jesus. Since Peter was Mark's source for this Gospel, why did Mark fail to mention that fact? There could be a number of reasons, but I suspect it is because it is not relevant to the point Mark wanted to make about this miracle of Jesus walking on water and the disciple's reaction to that miracle.
 - e) Verse 51 mentions that Jesus climbed in the boat and then the wind calmed down. If Jesus "lacked the gravity" to walk on water, notice that Jesus "regained" the gravity when he got inside the boat. The point is Jesus didn't stand in midair, but on the boat.
26. Verse 52: They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.
- a) The verse says the disciples did not understand about the loaves. What did Jesus mean by that? They just saw another miracle before their very eyes. What didn't they get?
 - b) Notice the text says they didn't understand about Jesus walking on water. The text says they didn't understand about the loaves. The disciples got the fact the miracle occurred. What they didn't get was the fact that Jesus would provide for all of our needs even if Jesus asks the "impossible" or if Jesus is not physically present with them.

- i) Think of it this way: Jesus asked the disciples to do the impossible. He asked them to feed thousands of people with a few fish and a few loaves of bread. What they didn't get was that Jesus is capable of doing the impossible when we give Him whatever resources are in our hands to accomplish what He desires of us.
 - c) These stories remind us that God asks us as well to do the impossible. He calls on us to "deny ourselves and live for him daily". (See Matthew 10:38 on this point.) Without the power of God, that is impossible to do. Anything we do for God, we can only do through His power. That is the thing the disciples missed and we miss often as followers of Him.
- 27. Verse 53: When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus.⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.⁵⁶ And wherever he went--into villages, towns or countryside--they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.
 - a) So what or where is Gennesaret? This is a flat area of land by the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee. It is a Jewish area and is part of the traditional area of Israel.
 - b) As soon as Jesus got off the boat, people recognized Him. Sick people either came or were brought to Jesus. All those who had "some" faith that Jesus had the power to heal were able to touch Jesus and were healed.
 - c) OK, what's the purpose of this last story and how does it fit in?
 - i) All of the stories in this chapter dealt with a lack of faith. Here in this last story, we get people simply trusting in Jesus and they were made better of whatever problem they had at that moment.
 - d) After all the negative stories of this chapter, I think Mark simply wanted to show us that all of the effort we make to tell others about Jesus is "worth it" in that some people do change their lives based on who Jesus is.
- 28. I can summarize the whole chapter from our perspective with the phrase, "Beware of the dangers of a lack of faith". Which of course, is the title to this lesson.
 - a) Jesus' hometown didn't believe in Him and Jesus only could do a few miracles there. A lack of faith prevents God from violating our free will and seeking Him for help.
 - b) Jesus' disciples were then told to go from town and to town and be Jesus' "front-men" to tell others to change their lives and believe in Him. What is conspicuously missing from this chapter is the results of their preaching. Yes, people probably believed the miracles the disciples did and they may have come to see Jesus, but history told us that collectively, the Nation of Israel still rejected Jesus at the time of the cross. My point is there is no real change in life unless we repent and desire to please God with our lives.
 - c) Next we had the story of King Herod having John the Baptist killed. A key point of this story is that Herod didn't have the faith to stand up for his own convictions and an innocent man (John the Baptist) was killed for a lack of faith.
 - d) Next we had the story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 people and the story of Jesus walking on the water. The disciples witnessed both miracles, but still did not grasp the full power of Jesus and what He is capable of doing in our lives.
 - e) The final verses of this chapter show what happens when one does fully trust in God and seek Him to make our lives better.
 - f) The general idea is not to think, "Well, Jesus can help in that aspect of my life, but I don't yet trust Him to deal with this aspect over here." A similar idea is to wrongly think, "Jesus has not worked yet (on my timing) and therefore, He is not here in this situation." All of these stories about Jesus teach us what He is capable of doing if we fully trust in Him for every (that's every) aspect of our lives.
- 29. Let's pray: Father, help us to increase our faith in You. Help us to realize that You are always working in our life "your way and on your timing". Help us to trust in You, keep our focus on You and "repent" in that we should always care about making a difference for You.