

Disciples Do Not Understand: Recognizing the Servant King - Mark 6:30-56

Pastor Tim Rech, Clearcreek Chapel

Introduction

Failing to recognize something or someone can be alarming and embarrassing. If you have ever attended a class reunion you will know what I talking about. Someone walks up to you who you have not seen for a long time and you cannot remember him or her but they recognize you. "Hello Tim, it is good to see you, how are you? you remember me.....right?"

Or how about when there is someone in your life who you really think you know well, but then a situation occurs which show you that person in a whole new light. Or maybe it causes you to truly know them for the first time. This often happens with young people who as they advance into adulthood better understand their parents. "Dad, now I see why you did what you did way back then..." Or perhaps it is a former boss who you later get to know as a friend and then understand why they managed you the way they did.

Such was the situation for the disciples of Jesus in Mark 6 albeit it involved their relationship with someone far greater than anyone in these examples. So let us turn to Mark 6...

So far in the chapter, we have seen Jesus send out the twelve with authority over unclean spirits and with minimal physical provision to cast out demons, heal the sick, and proclaim that people should repent. He granted them the authority and the duty to do all that He was doing. They were to be imitators of Him – this should sound familiar to us today, right?

Before and after this sending though, we saw in verses 1-6 Jesus rejected in His hometown by those who knew Him best (his relatives and household), and then in verses 14-15, rejected by the people who thought He was John the Baptist, Elijah, or one of the prophets of old – note that in their thinking, the options were limited to mortal men. Herod was part of the crowd and was convinced it was John the Baptist. Verses 16-29 give us the tragic story of how the cowardly Herod, in his great fear of man, refused to do the right thing and executed John the Baptist.

Now the fact that Jesus's hometown plus Herod and many in the crowd did not truly recognize Jesus was not a surprise. However, in passage today, verses 30-56 we may be surprised by who else did not recognize Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Let us read 6:30-44....

³⁰ The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. ³² And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. ³³ Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things. ³⁵ And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. ³⁶ Send

them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”
³⁷ *But he answered them, “You give them something to eat.” And they said to him, “Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii^[a] worth of bread and give it to them to eat?”* ³⁸ *And he said to them, “How many loaves do you have? Go and see.” And when they had found out, they said, “Five, and two fish.”* ³⁹ *Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass.* ⁴⁰ *So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties.* ⁴¹ *And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all.* ⁴² *And they all ate and were satisfied.* ⁴³ *And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish.* ⁴⁴ *And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.*

A Report and Retreat (6:30-32)

So verse 30 resumes the narrative of verse 13. Jesus had given twelve ordinary men the power to heal and to cast out demons and to preach with power. And they accomplished many things and the men had much to tell Jesus.

After hearing them though, Jesus could see they needed rest. His remedy, as was typical for Himself, was to take them away to a desolate or deserted place to rest. It was time to retreat – they had ministered to so many and the people were continually coming and going. There was not even time to eat a meal. If you are doing regular ministry, you can understand. And I hope you take some time away - it is divinely authorized – time alone away with Jesus to hear His Word and to talk with Him in prayer, there is nothing better and more critical to the follower of Christ. The “crowd” can wear you out and there is nothing worse than a “cranky” Christian in ministry because he or she is exhausted. Get some rest....but you must return.

So Jesus, the Servant King, continually served the disciples and acted to meet their greatest need which was rest. And they went away in a boat, the only way it seemed to get away from the crowd, to seek some temporary solitude and rest in a deserted place.

Compassion for the Crowd (6:33-34)

But this plan was interrupted in verse 33 because they could not escape from the crowd who recognized Jesus and the twelve traveling in the boat. The people from many towns, having understood their intended landing point across the water, ran to meet them. And they ran fast for they were on the shore waiting for them before they arrived.

So much for rest and relaxation. But Jesus, ever the Servant, did not see this as a problem but rather an opportunity. For He had compassion for the huge crowd – compassion here being that deep seated care for other people, true sympathy, and tender mercy. It was that feeling in the “gut” of care for other people, a people who were like sheep without a shepherd, leaderless, drifting, and aimless. This verse and scene bring to mind Ezekiel 34 where God, on the heels of a scathing indictment of the spiritual shepherds of that day for neglecting the sheep under their care, promises in 34:11 and following that:

11 “.... I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. 12 As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.....15 I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord God.....22 I will rescue[b] my flock; they shall no longer be a prey. And I will judge between sheep and sheep. 23 And

I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David and he shall feed them: he shall feed them and be their shepherd. 24 And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord; I have spoken.

This is the heart of Jesus, the compassionate Servant King. The plan for rest had been interrupted and that was ok. The people needed to be ministered to and to hear a word from God. And so it is today. How we all just need to hear and be taught the Word of God.

An “Impossible” Charge (6:35-38)

By verse 35 though, the day was coming to a close and the disciples urged Jesus to send the people away so they could get something to eat. At first glance, this seems reasonable. It was a large crowd, it was getting late, and they would need to go to their homes and get something to eat. But somehow it does not seem the primary concern of the disciples is for the people – they did not share the same level of compassion Jesus did. Rather they desired to be alone in this deserted place. “Jesus, please send them away – enough already!”

In verse 37 however, Jesus gives them a startling and profound answer. Rather than going along with their line of thinking, He answers them with a command that at first seems impossible. “*You give them something to eat.*” Now how might twelve ordinary men standing in a deserted place feed five thousand men (not to mention the additional thousands of women and children also there)? There were no resources there for such provision – or was there?

We need to give Jesus’ command some thought. Was it so unreasonable? The disciples had recently been given power to cast out demons, heal the sick, and preach the Word with power. Might they not do the miraculous to feed such a large crowd?

Besides and more importantly, did they not recognize the One who gave them this power? There will be more on this as we move along...

Regardless, the disciples were not of the same mind as Jesus. To them His command was absurd, the task far too large, and the location far too desolate. And moreover, they really did not seem to care enough. In verse 37 they respond with mild sarcasm in essence saying; “shall we run over to the Kroger and spend a year’s worth of income on food for this crowd? And even if we could Jesus, do you think that would be enough?”

Jesus, undeterred, then continues along the same line of thinking that the disciples thought impossible and asks in verse 38, “*How many loaves do you have? Go and see.*” To the ordinary person, Jesus would be considered the ultimate optimist or positive thinker. But that was not where Jesus was going with His question and the disciples did not understand nor were they responding in faith.

But the disciples went and took inventory and returned to Jesus. Notice that despite their not understanding, they still obeyed Him. This is a good reminder for us; better to obey and understand later than the other way around. The disciples brought back five loaves and also two fish. Jesus had not asked for the fish but it indicated some effort on their part to help the people. This small amount of food though confirmed in human terms how hopeless it would be for the disciples to feed the crowd. Maybe now Jesus would call off this idea. It is clear they saw only the problem and not the potential.

Miraculous Provision (6:39-44)

However, this is right where Jesus, the Servant King, wanted the situation. It was an opportunity to teach His disciples and after having fed the crowd spiritually, He would now feed them with physical food.

He began by seating them in groups in an orderly fashion on the green grass. Note that our God is one of order. How this brings to mind Psalm 23:1-2, *“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures.”* Remember how sheep will not naturally lie down when hungry – without a shepherd, they will only wander. Such were these needy sheep but the Shepherd, promised in Ezekiel and the Old Testament, had come.

He then took the meager rations, gave thanks, and broke the loaves into a sufficient quantity to feed the hungry crowd of people. Now let us not hurry past these verses. Yes, we have heard them before but let us not lose our sense of awe and wonder over what Jesus did here. He likely fed over fifteen thousand people – all with five loaves of bread and two fish. And he could have fed many more for there were twelve small wicker baskets leftover.

It is hard to ignore the number twelve – twelve tribes of Israel, twelve disciples. Israel is in view here – in a couple of chapters later we will see this miracle repeated but with a worldwide scope and seven large baskets leftover. Why seven? Well, you will need to come back in three weeks! But for now, Jesus the Servant King showed He could more than satisfy the needs of His people Israel. And for the disciples, with Jesus they had the provision to meet the needs of those He commanded them to meet with plenty leftover. Who is this Jesus anyway?

A Terrifying Figure (6:45-52)

We read on in verses 45-52...

*⁴⁵ Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶ And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray. ⁴⁷ And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. ⁴⁸ And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night^[b] he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, ⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, ⁵⁰ for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹ And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. **And they were utterly astounded, ⁵² for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.***

In verse 45, Jesus then commands his disciples to immediately get into the boat and sail for Bethsaida. Unlike the other gospel writers, Mark does not tell us why but it is consistent with how Jesus did things; big miracles and great teachings followed by a retreat.

As the disciples sail away, Jesus sends the crowd home and then goes up onto the mountain to pray. Verse 47 tells us He did not take His eye off of the disciples though. The wind was preventing the disciples from making significant progress. And after nine or so hours and sometime between three and six a.m., Jesus came to His exhausted disciples. Their day had consisted of retreating to a deserted place

to rest but then ministering to a huge crowd until evening followed by nine-plus hours of rowing on the sea against the wind. They were helpless, devoid of strength, and getting nowhere.

But then in verse 48, Jesus comes to them in their hour of greatest need – which He often does. Have you noticed that in your life? He walked to them on the sea (yes, He walked on the sea) but rather than come directly into the boat, Jesus intended to walk past them so they could see Him. Recognizing Him, they could then be encouraged, reassured, and even invite Him into the boat. When they saw Him though, they did not understand. The sight of Jesus terrified them and they screamed, for they thought He was a ghost. He was not real to them but simply an apparition. But instantly they heard the words for which all disciples need to hear from their master, “*Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.*”

After hearing Jesus’s reassuring words and the wind ceasing upon His entry into the boat, the disciples’ great terror turned to astonishment in verse 51. They had not recognized Jesus coming to them. They did not understand what happened back on land with the crowd and certainly did not understand His walking on the sea. Is this possible? Could disciples not recognize their master? Yes it is, and Mark tells us why and it was not because of sea water in their eyes – rather they possessed hard hearts. Hard hearts are characterized by unbelief and sin and spiritual blindness. Their hearts were not poised to receive Him. As a result, they did not recognize Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in His fullness.

Jesus Recognized Again (6:53-56)

We read on in verses 53-56...

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. ⁵⁴ And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him ⁵⁵ and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. ⁵⁶ And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

Our passage then closes as Mark shows us the resumption of Jesus’s ministry. The boat lands in a different town than what the disciples set out for but the result was the same – the people recognized him immediately and by faith began to bring their sick from all over the region for Jesus to heal them. And since they came in faith, the sick only needed to touch the edge of His clothing and they were healed. People in this region recognized Jesus for who He was and as a result, mighty works were done there. This contrasts sharply with the great unbelief Jesus faced in His hometown at the beginning of the chapter.

So what is the point of these three scenes? The key is in how they are tied together. In verse 33 of the first scene, we saw that the crowd recognized Jesus and they rushed to be with Him so that they could be healed of demon possession and from physical affliction and also to hear His teaching. The same is true in the third scene (verse 54) on the other side of the sea; Mark tells us again that the crowd recognized Jesus and ran to Him that their sick might be healed. Now we rightly can question the motivation of the crowds and could reference the other gospels to see that many wanted Jesus for what He could give them (healing, food, deliverance from the Romans, etc.) and not for whom He truly was. However, we must stay in Mark for he had something in particular to show us. In fact, he tells us little about the crowd’s motivations other than they wanted to come to Jesus. They were certain that they

could receive physical relief and healing – He was clearly not of this world and was able to do it. Among members of the crowd, faith was being expressed in Jesus, the Servant King.

Sandwiched between the two scenes, the focus is upon the Lord's disciples. Their response to Jesus was different; they did not fully recognize Him. They only saw the Servant and not the Divine King. To them, Jesus' compassion towards the crowd was to be commended but their lack of understanding limited the potential they saw in Jesus and reduced Him to just another man. In view of the miracles Jesus performed, this is difficult to understand but Mark tells us why – *"their hearts were hardened."*

Although they saw the miraculous feeding of thousands, the disciples did not expect to see Jesus and did not come to learn the secret of Jesus' true identity. Again, their hearts were not receptive and they were spiritually dull.

And like His family back in His hometown, the disciples were too familiar with Jesus. They thought they knew Him but really did not.

Reflect and Respond

So in this passage we see Jesus Christ, the Son of God who:

- Is the Servant King that came to earth not to be served but to serve – the God of the universe who uses His divine power for His people
- Is filled with compassion for people who are like sheep without a shepherd and who extends grace common to all men
- Tirelessly meets the needs of His people whether to give rest, enabling power to obey and minister to others, or to perfectly satisfy them with spiritual and physical food
- Is ever patient with His disciples – serving them, teaching them, and progressively revealing Himself to them
- Never takes His eyes off of His disciples and who comes to them in the storms of life – the One who always seeks to be with them and who when He comes, gives courage and chases away fear with His presence and His Word

Do you fully recognize this Jesus or are you surprised by what Mark shows us about Him? Is he different than your personal version of Jesus?

If you do not fully recognize Him, could it be that:

- Your heart is hard and unreceptive and limits your recognition of Him and His power in your life? Have you not applied the spiritual lessons He has been trying to teach you? Or perhaps there is a particular sin in your life that has dulled your understanding?
- You are self-sufficient in your thinking and need not the Servant King day-to-day or much less to be served by Him?

- In your trials and troubles, you reject Him because you do not really believe He will come to your aid or perhaps you think He is powerless to do so? Or do you think He only attends to others in their need and not to yours?
- When He comes to you, you reject Him because it is not in the manner in which you expect or demand?
- You do not share His heart to serve others? Perhaps the thought of a Servant King is offensive to you. What is your level of compassion for the lost and those in need?

Beware of a hard heart – a heart where Christ is not received into it or where expressions of love are prevented from flowing out from it to others. Examine your heart.

If you see your recognition of the Servant King falling short, be encouraged though by this Jesus who told the twelve and now tells us, *“Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid.”* As He did with the twelve, He is working through our difficulties and troubles to illuminate and soften our hard hearts – we are in process. And never forget, He came not only to serve His people but as we will see in the coming chapters of Mark, came to give to His life as a ransom to save many from their sins for eternity.

So recognize the Servant King, run to Him as the crowds did, draw close to Him, and if you have a hard heart, surrender it to Him, so that you may know Him more and learn to serve Him and others better in your life. And in the process, may He be glorified in you above all things.

Let’s pray...