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Mark 6:1-32

In this series we have seen an epic battle unfolding between the reigns of Satan and God. If we remember that Mark's book is about Jesus message, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel." we will notice the battle unfolding.

First, Jesus recruits "soldiers" in Mark 1:16 and then goes on to healing the sick and preaching about the Kingdom. Showing his power over Satan, Jesus then touches a leper and heals him and forgives the sin of a paralytic while demonstrating that the Sabbath derives its significance from Him. Then Jesus selects the twelve so that they can be an extension of Jesus "attack" on the kingdom of Satan. Following this, Jesus claims that the only way he can remove demons is because he has bound the strong man (an obvious allusion to Satan's power). After such a claim Jesus' family attempts to stop what they perceive as crazy teaching, but Jesus emphasizes that he is not crazy, but that he has come to establish a kingdom and family that transcends blood.

Jesus then described how difficult it was to receive the kingdom and the way that people listen and understand it. So he warns those who listen to him to watch how they hear the Kingdom of God, because to misunderstand it is to miss the Kingdom and the King. And Jesus explains that his speaking in parables is for the confusion of those who were listening, that judgment be brought upon Israel so that the judgment due to Israel would be poured out on Christ.

But to further demonstrate the power of the Kingdom, Jesus shows that he has power over the winds and the sea. Furthermore, the account of the healing of the Gentile, ritually unclean Gerasene demonic along with the healing of the woman with a 12 year bleeding cycle show the amazing power of Jesus. But the story of Jairus's daughter is even more astounding, for Jesus demonstrates that his Kingdom has the power over death. It is within this unfolding story that Mark tells of Jesus reception at his hometown.

And it is within this flowing narrative we find how these verses apply to Christ and the kingdom, and therefore to us.

I would like to acknowledge that there are a number of people in here going through difficult things. Tonight you may be here and be numb to what is being preached because of physical pain or loss. Others may have sin that has simply clouded their mind and makes it difficult for them to listen. I want to encourage you to take hope! For I believe that this text contains one of the most beautiful pictures of the Gospel. For as we see what the text means, it will help you see the beauty of Christ and the Gospel more clearly and it will provide hope in a world of hopelessness.

After all of the success that Jesus has had in ministry, one would think that he would come home to a grand celebration, enjoying the success of Jesus ministry. And at first, things appeared to be going well when Jesus entered Nazareth, he was asked to speak in the synagogue on the Sabbath, which is giving Jesus recognition as some kind of teacher. But his teaching quickly offended them. Growing up with

Jesus and knowing him as a child were problematic. Notice, they didn't bring a charge against his character, but they asked essentially, "Isn't this guy from Nazareth? We know this guy is nothing special; he and his family lived here with us! Who does this guy think he is?"

The greater South Bend area is much larger than Nazareth, and in our democratic and individualistic society, we may not appreciate why the people from Nazareth responded this way.

In the ancient world, identity was tied very closely with where you are from. For example, we know Jesus as Jesus of Nazareth. So for Jesus to be teaching and preaching when he is from Nazareth and his father is a carpenter is nearly scandalous! Mark does not tell us what Jesus preached, but knowing what Mark has told us about Jesus ministry we know that he spoke in parables and that he preached repentance for the kingdom was at hand. Very quickly, the Nazarene's were offended.

As a result, their lack of faith stopped the coming of the Gospel in power. Jesus only did a few miracles in that town and healed only a few because they would not receive him. In response, Jesus was stunned at their level of disbelief. But this raises an important question. Is the power of the kingdom limited? Can God overcome faithlessness? One of the great early commentators on Scripture, Origen, responded to this question this way,

*"There is an attraction in faith toward the divine power according to what Jesus said 'If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say unto this mountain, 'Move to another place' and it shall be moved.' Matthew and Mark wish to present the all-surpassing value of that divine power as a power that works even in those who do not believe. But they did not deny that grace works even more powerfully among those who have faith. So it seems to me that they accurately said not that the Lord did not do **any** mighty works, because of their unbelief, but that he did not do **many** there. Mark does not flatly say that he could do no mighty work there at all, but added, "except that he laid his hands upon a few sick and healed them." Thus the power in Him overcame even their unbelief."*

So then, the kingdom of God can overcome unbelief, but the unbelieving individual cannot experience the power of the kingdom in its fullness.

And while the kingdom of God was certainly advancing and moving forward despite Nazareth's rebellion, they brought judgment upon themselves. For not placing their faith in Christ was an act of rebellion against the King.

Let us just say for example that the citizens of South Bend decided to refuse to acknowledge the rule of the United States government and the President. You decide to set-up your own government and refuse to pay taxes to the federal government. There would be some implications: First, you forfeit your rights as an American citizen and the benefits that come with it, and second, you will be storing up judgment for yourself, for when the time comes, the government will retake the land and resources that are part of its territory.

Your rejection of the US government doesn't change the fact that you are actually under their authority and power, it only changes the relationship you have to the authority. And so it is with the kingdom of God, there is no King more powerful than Jesus, and his kingdom is expanding, bringing peace to those who accept him by faith, and judgment to those who willfully reject the Gospel.

And as a result of Nazareth's disbelief, Jesus leaves Nazareth (which demonstrates judgment) and teaches in the villages. And it is here that Jesus commissions the twelve to the ministry of proclaiming the message: *"The time is near and the coming of God is at hand, repent and believe in the Gospel"*.

Jesus sends out the disciples and tells them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread no bag, no money—but to wear sandals and not put on 2 tunics. Why these regulations?

The preaching of the kingdom and its expansion signaled the end of the exile, or the end of the captivity of the people of God to sin. Exodus 12:11 reads, *"In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste"*

Just like Israel was to be ready because the exile was at hand, the Twelve were called to proclaim the message of the Kingdom in the same manner. They were not to take bread or money because God would provide for them, as he did in the desert with water from the rock, manna from heaven, and quail.

Jesus signals that Satan's reign is coming to an end! And Jesus sending out the Twelve to preach the Gospel is to demonstrate that the kingdom is expanding; which is how the narrative of Jesus' Nazareth rejection and the sending of the Twelve are woven together.

As the disciples go, they are to find those that are hospitable to this message about Jesus and stay with them. On Sunday mornings, we have been learning how important hospitality is to true spirituality, and the reception of the Gospel is equal to the hospitality you show the one coming in Jesus' name. These people would not have known any of the Twelve, but their holiness was manifested in their hospitality. So are you hospitable? Are you taking people into your home and showing concern for them? How have you served your pastor and shown he and his family hospitality?

Notice that the power of the Gospel does not come to those who reject the message, like in Sodom and Gomorrah... or in Nazareth. Instead of receiving the blessing of God, this group receives judgment.

So after charging the Twelve to consider the hospitality of their audience, he tells them to preach repentance for the coming of the kingdom. Then to confirm the preached message, the Twelve cast out demons and anointed with oil those who were sick and healed them. It should be noted that the disciples were called to use oil to anoint the sick, whereas Jesus did not need the oil when he healed. Jesus' had the power to anoint without the traditional use of oil.

To prove that the message of Jesus is expanding and that Nazareth was foolish to reject him, Mark narrates that King Herod heard of Jesus and the Twelve's ministry and their proclamation (in continuity with John) that the kingdom of God was at hand.

Herod was immediately gripped with fear and Mark begins to recount the activities that give him reason for his fear.

His first reaction is that Jesus is the resurrected John the Baptist or one who was coming in continuity with John's message. Others in the land were saying that Jesus was Elijah while others said that Jesus was a prophet like Jeremiah, Isaiah, or a number of the other prophets.

Either way, Herod was afraid that if the Messiah was coming, he would be subjected to judgment because of the way he handled John the Baptists situation.

Giving background to Herod's fear, Mark tells his readers about the events surrounding John the Baptists murder.

John had been preaching his message of repentance and focused particularly on Herod's relationship with Herodias, his brother's wife. The text tells us that Herod had married her while she was still with his brother Phillip.

Herodias was upset that John would call her and Herod out for this, but Herod's response was somewhat different. He was perplexed by John's teaching, but also listened intently. He arrested John but kept him under close watch to ensure his safety because he feared him as a prophet.

On Herod's birthday he held a great banquet with a number of the leading men in Galilee. At this banquet, Herodias's daughter danced for Herod and the guests and greatly pleased them. It is generally thought that this dancing was a type of seductive dancing and in the revelry of the moment Herod promises to do anything that she wants.

Being controlled by her mother, the girl tells her mother the promise of Herod. Seeking an opportunity to eliminate John, Herodias instructed her daughter to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter. Fearing the disapproval of his friends, colleagues, and subjects, Herod was exceedingly sorry for making the oath, but he still had John executed and gave the head to Herodias and her daughter. Mourning John's disciples came and placed his body in a tomb.

This story has striking similarities and differences from the Old Testament narrative in 1 Kings 19 when Ahab and Jezebel pursue Elijah after he slaughtered the prophets of Baal. The evil queen influences the weak ruler to get rid of the prophet of God. The endings of the story are different though, it appears that Herodias has gotten her way.

We know that Jezebel's body was eventually devoured by the dogs, but Scripture does not seem to indicate anything about Herodias's fate after these events. So was Herodias more powerful than Jezebel? Was she finally able to thwart the prophets of God?

The answer to this question is found through the position of the story though. For when Herodias thought she had rid herself of the prophet of God, the court begins to hear about this man named Jesus.

And Jesus was not simply preaching, he was also healing the sick, raising the dead! Jesus even has the authority to commission his disciples to be an extension of his ministry. So the kingdom of God is growing, people are hearing the message and are intrigued by what Jesus message means. They did not fully realize it or embrace it (and interestingly, neither did the Twelve), but they wanted to hear more about the coming of the kingdom of God.

In verse 30 we read that the disciples return to Jesus to tell him all of their success. Jesus, recognizing that they had gathered a large following said, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while."

Jesus and the disciples needed time to refresh and be re-energized to continue proclaiming the message. So Jesus takes them away from the crowds for this purpose.

Summarizing the passage then we see three things. First, we notice the disbelief from the people closest to Jesus and his ministry. Second, we see Jesus commissioning of the disciples and the importance of hospitality for those who profess faith in the Gospel. And third, we see the far reaching impact that the Gospel had, so that it even reached King Herod.

But we may find ourselves asking the question, what does this mean? What does this passage tell me about Christ and what does that then mean for me?

First, I believe it shows that we must be careful with how we receive the message of God. The Nazarene's figured that Jesus could not be special because of his social status. This arrogance is a misunderstanding of how the kingdom of God works, as we saw in Mark 4 with the parable of the mustard seed. God uses weak individuals to demonstrate the power of the Gospel.

Second and related to One, is that to the measure we receive those who bring the Gospel is the measure that we will receive it. We cannot assume that we love God if we do not seek to love his people by bringing them in and showing them love.

But Third, I think that dwelling on the story of John the Baptist is important.

Many of you find yourselves in situations that are simply undesirable sometimes because of your sin, but numerous times for things that are out of your control.

In the present economy, men and women are losing jobs. Families are struggling to make ends meet. Perhaps others of you have lost a close family member, or maybe illness or cancer has struck you or your family. Perhaps others have to deal with the abusive cycle that a loved one puts themselves through with substance abuse. For others of you, perhaps you are getting older and you cannot function like you used to be able to.

If the physical burdens of this life were not enough, we have the constant battle with sin in our own hearts. Perhaps you find yourself in a vicious cycle of sin, and you have been driven to the point of despair. It seems that Herodias has ordered your head be served on a platter, that your sins have finally overcome you.

But brothers and sisters, we do have hope! We have hope that our bodies and our family members body will be restored. We have hope that sin has been conquered and that we can fight against the power of Satan. And this is found at the cross.

At the cross, Jesus body went through extreme pain as his fleshed suffered for your sins and mine on the cross. And on that same cross Jesus Christ experienced the wrath of God and the loneliness and emptiness of sin on your behalf.

So to those who are currently faced with physical pain, suffering, and death, know that your body will not see decay, for Jesus' body has not seen decay! Though the narrative of John the Baptists appears to end in tragedy, John's body will be resurrected on that last day as will yours.

And those who are struggling with sin, take heart! For by faith in Christ we are no longer captive to sin! But you may say Brandon do you understand what I have done?! I cannot control myself, I continue to sin, I cannot stop!

But brothers and sisters, do not look to yourselves. By faith look to Christ and what he did on the cross for those who look to Him in faith. We are not justified by our striving or our outward purity but by Christ. So do not become overcome by the power of your sin, but look to Christ who is the source of righteousness. And conversely, do not puff yourselves up thinking you are in good standing because you have been obedient. Instead, in all things look to Christ, who suffered and was buried. But on the third Day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into Heaven and is seated in glory at the right hand of the Father, and his Kingdom shall have no end.

As we look to Christ, we recognize that we are coming out of the wilderness of sin and death, into lives of holiness in Christ. So live as those confident in Christ's provision on the cross, knowing that the power of the kingdom comes to those who believe in the King. And we follow our great King into glory, striving against sin and Satan.