

Sermon Notes/Follow-up
Mark 6
June 29, 2014
Pastor Rich Lusk

These notes will pull together some loose ends from all of the sermons I've preached on Mark 6, not just the last one. The whole chapter is worthy of careful study and review.

Mark 6 is a chapter loaded with interesting examples of intertextual allusions. We have already seen the use of Psalm 23 as background to Jesus feeding the multitudes. But there are some other OT echoes that, while less prominent, help fill out the picture of what's going on in this chapter. Grasping the OT background is crucial to understanding Mark's portrayal of Jesus, especially in contrast to his enemies.

Herod has John the Baptist beheaded when his step daughter, described as a little girl, requests it. John's head is then presented on a platter at the feast, as if it were the chief item on the menu. Herod had promised the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you, up to half my kingdom." We've already seen that Herod was, technically, not a king and therefore had no kingdom to give. But we should also notice that this promise echoes another biblical story. In the OT, there is another young woman promised by a king "whatever you ask me, up to half my kingdom." Ahasuerus, ruler of the Persian Empire made this offer to Esther. How did Esther respond? She took advantage of the opportunity to save her people, to bring them salvation from certain death. How did the girl in Mark 6 use the offer? To bring death. She asked for John's head on a platter...and received it. Herod wanted nothing more than to be known as "King of the Jews" but his actions show why he cannot hold that title with any integrity. Herod doesn't even measure up the standard of the pagan king Ahasuerus, as Ahasuerus ended up issuing a decree that brought salvation to the Jews, while Herod's decree killed the greatest Jewish prophet. Herod's household is bent on destroying the righteous. Even though Herod is reluctant to grant the girl her wish (because he knows John to be righteous), Herod keeps his vow because the promise was made in front of his nobles. It's ironic because Herod was not known as a vow keeper; indeed, he broke his marital vows to take Herodias as his wife.

While Herod is devouring the choicest sheep in the Lord's flock, what is Jesus, the true shepherd-king, doing? Herod throws a feast; Jesus does too. While the stories are not, strictly speaking, happening at the same time, Mark pairs them together to create a contrast. While Herod is serving up John's head on a platter at his false feast, Jesus is providing the true feast in the wilderness. He sees the people following him in the wilderness as "sheep without a shepherd" (meaning Herod was no shepherd-king!) and so he takes compassion on them. He makes them recline on the "green grass" and miraculously multiplies bread to feed them. The reference to green grass pops out of nowhere – the area has already been described as a

wilderness area, but Jesus is turning the deserted wasteland into a new Eden, a place of abundant food. While Herod is a wolf king, feasting on the righteous, Jesus is the Good Shepherd of Psalm 23, feeding the crowd til their cups run over.

Mark is a very sparsely written book, so the detail of the color of the grass pricks our ears and forces us to ponder its connections. It takes us straight back to Psalm 23. Jesus is YHWH in the flesh, the Lord who has come to provide for his people.

The fact that Herod's ungodly feast takes place on his birthday links it with yet another OT story. In the story of Joseph in Genesis, Joseph ends up in prison after Potiphar's wife falsely accuses him. Likewise, John, a new Joseph, ends up in prison because Herod's wife does not like his attacks on her unlawful marriage to Herod. On Pharaoh's birthday, Joseph was released and interpreted the king's dream. In Mark 6, another prisoner is released on the "king's" birthday, but only so he can be executed. Again Herod compares unfavorably to a Gentile ruler. Indeed, the closest comparison to Herod and Herodias from the OT is Ahab and Jezebel (with John playing the part of Elijah, the persecuted prophet), hardly a flattering comparison.

The story of Jesus walking on water is heavily freighted with OT allusions, particularly the exodus story. By picking up on these allusions, as I explained in the sermon, we find that Jesus is not only a new Moses leading a new exodus, but YHWH in the flesh, who has come to make the glory of God "pass by" the disciples. Indeed, now it is the disciples who are put the place of Israel, and especially Moses, witness, beholding the revelation of God's glory. Jesus is the great "I AM" who makes and keeps covenant promises to his people. The water is at his feet; the wind and waves are under his command; and when he is near, the disciples have nothing to fear!

If we pull the camera lens back and take in the whole of Mark 6-8, we begin to see a new exodus motif appearing. Mark is retelling and reshaping the story of the Exodus, this time centered on Jesus. Jesus is linked to Moses, certainly, but also to YHWH.

- In Mark 6:1-6, Jesus is rejected, even as Moses was (Ex. 2:11ff).
- Just as the Lord brought the 12 tribes out of Egypt, so Jesus calls the 12 apostles to himself.
- Jesus gives the disciples instructions reminiscent of the Passover, involving belt, staff, and sandals.
- Herod is likened to Pharaoh, a tyrant who imprisons/enslaves the people of God.
- Just as the Israelites were given miraculous manna from heaven in the wilderness, so Jesus provides "wonder bread" to the multitudes in the wilderness. They are his new Israel, the people of the new Passover and new exodus.

- Jesus crosses the sea while a strong wind blows. The language used here is heavily reminiscent of the Red Sea crossing. The glory of the Lord is revealed on the waters in rescuing the people.
- Jesus carries on a healing ministry from the “plagues” that curse Israel, even as the Lord promised they would not endure the diseases that plagued Egypt (Mk. 6:53-56; Ex. 15:26).
- Jesus interprets the law (Torah), showing its true meaning, over against Pharisaical distortions (Mk. 7)
- The Pharisees grumbled against Jesus, just like the Israelites grumbled against YHWH after the exodus. They are hard hearted (as are the disciples; cf. 8:17). See Psalm 95. The problem is that the disciples have not yet removed the old leaven of Egypt/Pharisees; thus, they cannot yet fully participate in the new Passover/exodus of Jesus (8:13ff).

Imagine being given an assignment to write a story about the Lord/King described in Psalm 23. You just might come up with something a lot like the story in Mark 6! In Mark 6, Jesus acts out the fulfillment of Psalm 23.

Matthew 10:40 is a good one verse summary of Mark 6:1-14.

The survey of mercy ministry from the sermon especially drew on Wes Baker’s series on Christian medical ministry, the first part of which is available here: <http://wesleybaker.blogspot.com/2014/06/healing-compassion-and-kingdom-witness.html>. Baker does an excellent job showing that we are called to give a double witness to the kingdom, in word and deed, just as Jesus did. If we are united to him, how can we do anything less?

Jimmy Gill provided the following quotation from John Stott’s book, *Christian Mission in the Modern World*:

“Our neighbour is neither a bodyless soul that we should love only his soul, nor a soulless body that we should care for its welfare alone, nor even a body-soul isolated from society. God created man, who is my neighbour, a body-soul-in-community. Therefore, if we love our neighbour as God made him, we must inevitably be concerned for his total welfare, the good of his soul, his body and his community.”