

# ***The Gospel of Mark – D-Group***

## ***Content for Fall 2021***

**Session #5 (For October 6)**  
**Mark 6:6b-7:37**



### **A Reminder about This Study**

During this session, we are working our way through the story of Jesus' life as Mark tells it. This Gospel provides us with a PORTRAIT of Jesus – a perspective that is similar to the other writers (especially Matthew and Luke), yet with his own unique emphases. In the end, it's about clarifying who Jesus is and what it means to follow Him. These guides are looking at the broader text/section we are covering each week with a more specific focus on key parts worth a closer look. All in all, the point of these guides is to help us navigate our way through this gospel as we come to see Jesus more clearly through the portrait Mark offers.

### **The Broader Section – Mark 6:6b-7:37**

*Especially when it comes to the reflection questions in this section, these are far more for your benefit if you find it helpful to jot such things down as you're reading. What matters most here in this part is actually reading the text itself.*

## **READ Mark 6:6b-7:37**

### **Some quick notes on this section:**

**Passing the Baton – from Jesus to the 12 (6:6b-13)** ... Jesus bestows authority to the 12 as He commissions them to participate in Kingdom work (see Matthew 10 for a more in-depth look at what Jesus taught on this occasion). They continue the work He started in both WORD – the message of “repent,” just like Jesus – and DEED – driving out demons and healing the sick.

**John the Baptist is beheaded (6:14-29)** ... this unit of text contains a lengthy flashback, especially vv. 17-29. In the midst of Jesus' growing popularity as a worker of miracles, King Herod is assuming that He has the spirit of John the Baptist at work through Him. That provides Mark with an opportunity to share the story of what had actually happened to John (again, it's a flashback to something previous in time). In some ways, amidst so much focus directly on Jesus, this seems to be out-of-place somewhat with all of the attention given to John. Yet, two things to consider. First, in the end, the text *does* start with a focus on who Jesus is; in fact, the responses here to the “who is Jesus?” question are going to re-surface in a significant scene in 8:27-30. Second, this is a story of corrupt people in power using their position to accomplish their own purposes. In that way, it provides a foreshadowing of the cross and Jesus' own death. There really are several connections in this scene anticipating what would happen to Jesus. Since this fits as an interruption of sorts (the story would be seamless from v. 13 into v. 30), it reminds us of the importance of the ongoing work of Jesus' followers. When Jesus eventually would experience the same earthly fate as John the Baptist, it was important that His people continue on His work as He had commissioned them to do!

**Feeding the 5,000 (6:30-45)** ... This miracle is the only one (besides Jesus' own resurrection) to appear in all 4 Gospels. As we've seen before, there is again much we can see about Jesus' compassion here (see v. 34). There is also the more astounding reality that Jesus has power over the material creation so that He can multiply five loaves and two fish to feed 5,000+ people! Considering the typical response from the crowds to His miracles, it is interesting that no mention is made of their response here. Nonetheless, we have more to add to the evidence of who Jesus is.

**Walking on the Water and More Ministry (6:46-56)** ... We have already seen two miracles showing Jesus' Lordship over nature – calming the storm in 4:35-41 and the preceding scene when Jesus fed 5,000 miraculously. Mark shares another such story with Jesus walking on water; He is indeed Lord of creation. We'll go a bit more in depth on this scene below.

**Further Controversy with the Pharisees – the Tradition of Handwashing (7:1-23)** ... We'll share more on this scene below as well. It's a continuation of the theme of conflict, especially between Jesus and the Pharisees with their traditions. It provides an opportunity for Jesus to share more about what's at the HEART of the matter when it comes to God's commands.

**Two More Miracles (7:24-37)** ... Both of these miracles are going to occur outside of traditional Jewish territory. They are also both going to show Jesus' willingness to engage with unclean Gentiles (that's a major motivation behind the handwashing traditions from earlier in chapter 7 – hands were washed as they were so as to avoid defilement from unclean people and their "spiritual cooties"). We find Jesus' initial response in v. 27 to be a bit odd; nonetheless, in both of these scenes, we see Him take His ministry beyond Jewish boundaries. Even as Jesus continues to ask for secrecy about what He has done, the amazement of the people compels them to keep spreading the stories of His miracles and what they communicate about His identity (see vv. 36-37).

***In general, what questions and/or observations do you have from reading this text?***

***What does this section teach us about Jesus and His identity?***

***APPLICATION-Centered ... what does this overall section teach us about following Jesus? For example, what are some of the instructions or commands we should live out (note if these are specific to an individual or more broadly for any follower of Jesus)? What are the Christ-like attitudes and actions this text highlights as appropriate for us to model as His followers?***

## **Key Scene #1 from Mark 6:45-52 – Jesus Walks on Water**

We can categorize Jesus' miracles broadly into a few areas: (1) healing physical diseases (including raising the dead), (2) casting out demons and (3) nature-miracles where Jesus demonstrates His authority over the created world. Each has its own significance as we see His power and authority over realms that even still today are seen as uncontrollable.

***Which types of miracles do you find to be most impressive and why? What significant message(s) do those particular types of miracles communicate about Jesus?***

After the food multiplication miracle, it could be easy for some to focus more on what Jesus can accomplish for them than on who Jesus is. It's good for us to remember that this is where the point ultimately lies with miracle stories. For sure, what Jesus has the power and authority to do has incredible implications for those who are His people. Yet, if we rush too quickly to the "what's in it for us?" direction, we miss something more foundational. (That seems to be part of what is happening with Mark's words in 6:52 – the feeding of the 5,000 was not just about the food being multiplied; rather, the point of the story is the identity of Jesus ... a matter that was undeniable from this scene on the water.) This scene with Jesus walking on the water puts an exclamation point on the matter of who Jesus is.

Consider a few details of the story:

- First, *Jesus is walking on water!* Many have tried to come up with alternate explanations for what is happening here (*e.g.* they were really quite close to shore, etc.). Everything about the response of the disciples points to them witnessing Jesus truly doing what the text says He did.
- Second, the text says that He was about to "pass them by." There was a concept called a "theophany" – it was used in reference to God's presence or appearing. In the overall context of this story, it's a significant connection point.
- Third, and most importantly, consider the words **"Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid."** At the center of it all we see a Greek word translated appropriately as "It is I." Yet, the actual Greek could also be translated as "I AM" – yes, the same identified Yahweh gave to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. In other words, this is not just some random "Hey guys, it's me, Jesus!" Rather, it's a loaded statement and claim of identification with God Himself. It's hard to argue with the claim of someone walking on the water.
- The disciples' response of complete amazement seems appropriate.

***How does this scene speak to you – what it says about who Jesus is as well as the kind of response to Him that it produces within you?***

## **Key Scene #2 from Mark 7:1-23 – A Controversy Leads to Teaching**

Mark returns to this theme of conflict between Jesus and the Jewish teachers of the Law. Once again (as with the Sabbath controversies of chapters 2 and 3), their traditions take center stage. Part of the traditions they had established revolved around the practice of handwashing. It's important to remember that this was far more about *spiritual* hygiene (avoiding being contaminated by unclean people) than physical. Upon a return from being in public, their handwashing practices helped to make sure they were ritually pure.

In response to their questions as to why Jesus' followers don't do these things properly as they should (an echo of 2:24), Jesus quickly turns the conversation back on them. They are concerned about the disciples' failure to keep their traditions. Meanwhile, they are elevating their own traditions to the point where they trump God's commands. **Read Jesus' words in vv. 6-13.**

***What is Jesus' real critique when it comes to these traditions?***

***How can we do similar things with our own traditions (remember to keep a distinction between actual Biblical commands and what we develop around those – which can be a hard balance)?***

***How does this become part of the dangerous trap of HYPOCRISY (see vv. 6ff)?***

From there, Jesus transitions from a conversation about handwashing to the *real* cause of defilement in vv. 14-23. This echoes teaching we see elsewhere from Jesus that emphasizes an INSIDE-OUT pattern (see Matthew 5:17ff as well as Luke 6:43-45). Proverbs would remind each of us to "guard your heart because it is the wellspring of life" (4:23). What is inside of us is going to bubble up to the surface and be expressed: good or bad. In the same way, Jesus' point in these verses is that the real cause of defilement is not what happens to the external surface of our skin, it's what flows out from our hearts.

***Good or bad, how can you see this reality at work in your own heart – what is within you becomes what is expressed externally?***

***How can we make sure we're focused on addressing the HEART and not just the surface externals?***