

*Where we start . . .*

It's easy to imagine it. Lots of people who read the Gospels and begin to enjoy the picture they find of Jesus there imagine what it might have been like to "be there" with Him. Drawing on the accounts that we have been reading about Jesus and His ministry, what do you think it would have been like to be part of His entourage?

*What we read . . .*

It's good to imagine such things, but we have to be careful that we actually let the Gospel itself define what it would have been like. Keep that in mind as you read Mark 6:1-13.

Jesus' ministry has been amazing and awe-inspiring; crowds flock to Him wherever He goes. What's different here in His hometown?

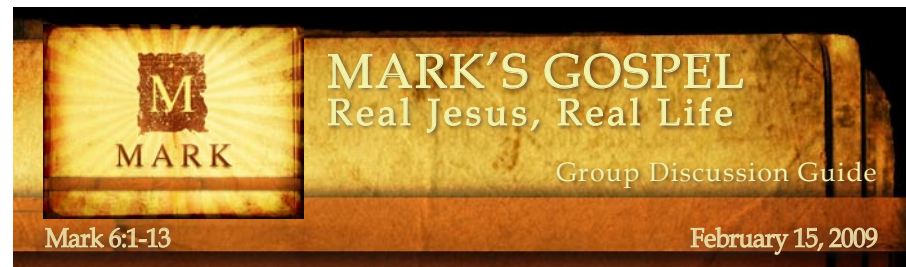
What do the questions raised by those who grew up with Jesus tell you about what they are thinking?

Picture yourself as part of Jesus' entourage as He returned to His hometown. Is the reaction He received what you would have expected? Why or why not?

It is shortly after this experience that Jesus sends the twelve out on their first "short-term mission trip." What insight will they be taking with them, drawing on what they witnessed in Jesus' hometown?

*Why this matters . . .*

We might be led to conclude that if we only "do it right" in following Jesus and doing what He wants for us that things will go well for us. How does what we see in Mark 6:1-13 speak to that kind of thinking?



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*Diving in . . .*

Up to this point in the Gospel of Mark, things certainly appear to be going pretty well for Jesus and His closest followers. Sure, there have been a few dissenters; some religious leaders are bothered by Him and those pig-herders asked Him to leave their area when His ministering to the demonized man upset their business plan. But, overall, if you were part of Jesus' entourage up to this point in time, things would be looking pretty sweet. Until now. As Mark unfolds the account we begin to see a different facet of the story . . . and it underscores for his readers (and for us) that walking with this Jesus might not be as rosy as we sometimes imagine.

*Discussing . . .*

Don't belabor the point, but in thinking through the opening question call attention to how easy it is for us to think that things would have been so much better if only "we could have been there" with Jesus. Many readers of the Gospels tend to voice ideas similar to that. Yes, it's true; it would have been amazing to travel with Jesus. But as we will see in this week's discussion, it might not have been quite as we imagine it.

Before reading the passage itself, you might reflect on what the ministry of Jesus has been like up to this point in Mark. Recall the opening moments in the synagogue, where the people were amazed and the deliverance of the demonized man stirred awe in everyone. Remind your group of the large crowds that showed up wherever Jesus went. Reflect for a moment on the gathering in the home where the roof had to be opened to let down the paralyzed man and the synagogue meeting where the man with the withered hand was healed. Glorious, amazing, wonderful things; and celebratory, awe-inspired, delightful responses.

Yes, there have been a few "bumps" along the way. A few of the religious seem bothered. The pig herders were put out by Jesus. But the ministry appears to be growing and widely received. It is that very momentum of popularity that makes what happens next all that more surprising.

As you read Mark 6:1-13, Mark doesn't mention the name of the city; he does tell us that Jesus returned to His "hometown." From 1:9 and 24 (and from the witness of the other Gospels), we know that Jesus was from

Nazareth. So, it is in Nazareth that the events recorded in 6:1-6 took place. Jesus is back among those whom He grew up with; He spent the first 30 years (or so) of His life here.

How do they respond when He arrives? Their questions tell us a great deal. The three questions recorded for us in 6:2 underscore two big ideas: 1) They had heard about (and maybe seen some) of the breath-taking ministry of Jesus; and 2) They weren't sure how to put that ministry together with how they thought about Jesus.

Their questions recorded in 6:3 go a bit beyond that. These questions are, in fact, much more pointed. To raise the question of Jesus being "a carpenter," is a subtle jab. They are saying, "He's just a common laborer! Such things are beyond him!" When they mention Jesus being "the son of Mary," the jab is even less subtle. In that culture, children were identified as the offspring of their father; even when the mother was a widow. To identify Jesus as the child of Mary carries the subtle implication of illegitimacy. They are saying, "This illegitimate child! Such things couldn't be done by such a one!" And the question raised about His siblings challenges the idea that Jesus could be, in any way, "special" (seeing that His siblings weren't!).

Now Mark places this account back-to-back with the sending of the twelve. And in that sending, although Mark tells us what Jesus said to them, the words of Jesus Mark quotes are where we should place the emphasis. What is Jesus driving home to the twelve? Even when they go out with great power and authority and carry out ministry in His name, they may well face rejection. That is what Jesus tells them; and that is what is pictured for us in Jesus' encounter with His own hometown.

In the way Mark juxtaposes these two accounts we see something of a "mirror image." The disciples are sent to carry out ministry very much like what they have seen Jesus do. They will be mirroring His ministry. But the disciples may well then also face the kind of resistance and rejection that Jesus also faced in Nazareth. They can also expect to see mirrored the response He received from His own people.

Does that reality have implications for us? Certainly; there are a number of potential thoughts to be drawn out. The final discussion question opens the door for some broad thinking about the implications. Such things like . . .

Those who think they know us well might be the ones least likely to listen to the story of how we have been changed by grace.

Even when we are doing exactly what God intends, we might not get a warm reception.

No matter how great our desire to serve, some might not be willing to receive service from our hands.