

Rejecting God

Mark 6:1-29

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Last week, Bo shared a message with us from Mark Chapter 5 where Jesus healed a woman afflicted for 12 years and also raised from the dead a 12-year-old girl. Do you get the impression that there is some significance to the number 12? I have a book on the meaning of numbers in Scripture, and it says the number 12 represents “government by divine appointment.” Certainly, Israel had 12 tribes and Jesus chose 12 disciples to lay the foundation for the church. We’ll look at these 12 disciples getting a commissioning this morning in Chapter 6.

The theme for the first part of Chapter 6 that we’ll look at this morning is rejection. We’ll see Jesus rejected, we’ll see Him prepare His disciples for rejection and we’ll see a pretty serious rejection of John the Baptist as God’s messenger.

Least you think the subject of rejection doesn’t apply to Christians because we have not rejected Jesus when it comes to our eternal salvation, we can still reject Him in other matters. Jesus wants to be involved in our lives all day, every day and when we deny Him that, we are effectively rejecting Him.

Alright, let’s look at what Mark says about rejection...

Mark 6:1-3 – Jesus’ countrymen reject Him.

Then He went out from there and came to His own country, and His disciples followed Him. And when the Sabbath had come, He began to teach in the synagogue. And many hearing Him were astonished, saying, “Where did this Man get these things? And what wisdom is this which is given to Him, that such mighty works are performed by His hands! Is this not the carpenter, the Son of Mary, and brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And are not His sisters here with us?” And they were offended at Him.

Jesus and His disciples went to the area around Nazareth, in the Galilee area. He spent a lot of time growing up in Nazareth and thus would have had a heart for the people there.

- Jesus taught in the place and during the time the Jews expected to receive instruction on spiritual matters, at the synagogue and on the Sabbath.

- His teaching astonished all who heard Him... this was not what they expected from a carpenter. In His hometown, Jesus faced a crowd that wondered how He became so powerful in both word and works.
- Jesus left Nazareth as a carpenter. He came back as a rabbi, complete with a group of disciples.

When His countrymen asked, “*is this not the carpenter;*” it was not a compliment.

- It was a way of pointing out that Jesus had no formal theological training. He was never a formal disciple of a rabbi, much less a prominent rabbi.

Jesus’ countrymen thought that His vocation as a carpenter discredited His message.

- But His beginnings as a humble carpenter only made His knowledge of spiritual matters all the more striking. The word carpenter was actually much broader than just one who works with wood. It had the idea of “a builder.” Jesus may have worked with stone as much as with wood, because stone was a much more common building material in that time and place.

It is wonderful to think that our Lord — of all the professions He could have been — chose to be a carpenter. God is the builder of the universe and all of us. As an accomplished builder, Jesus knows how to finish the job He started in us.

A few of the lessons-learned Jesus would have experienced as a carpenter were that:

- He learned there is a lot of potential in a log.
- He learned it takes work and time to make something useable.
- He learned that the finest things are made from the hardest wood.

Do you think this might have application to His building with people?

Jesus’ countrymen referred to Him as, “*the Son of Mary*” which also was not a compliment.

- It was not usual for Jews to describe a man as the son of his mother, even when she was a widow; it would have been an insult.

- Rumors that Jesus was illegitimate may have been behind this reference as well. Certainly, Mary got pregnant before she married Joseph.

Since Joseph wasn't mentioned probably implies that he died when Jesus was young; Jesus would have stayed at home to support His family until the younger children were old enough to support the family.

We learn here about Jesus' bothers and sisters, technically half-brothers and sisters since God Himself was the father of Jesus.

- This passage reveals that Mary did not remain a virgin after she gave birth to Jesus contrary to the perpetual virginity dogma of the Catholic Church.

Jesus' countrymen were offended at Him. They considered themselves familiar with Him and thought they knew Him, but they didn't.

Mark 6:4-6 – Jesus reacts to the rejection

But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, among his own relatives, and in his own house." Now He could do no mighty work there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. And He marveled because of their unbelief. Then He went about the villages in a circuit, teaching.

Jesus accepted rejection as the price a faithful prophet must pay, though it surely hurt Him badly to be rejected by friends and neighbors.

It says here, *He could do no mighty work there*: His work was limited in this climate of unbelief. Jesus' power was repressed by the unbelief of His countrymen.

- Despite the smothering influence of unbelief, the mercy of God still compelled Jesus to heal some sick people.

Jesus was amazed at their unbelief. He had done plenty of works revealing who He really was, the long awaited-for Messiah. But their pride in thinking they knew Him kept them blind to Him.

- Pride is what keeps all people in unbelief.
- On another occasion, Luke 7:9 records that Jesus marveled at the faith of a Gentile Centurian.
- This is a question all people should ask themselves: Would Jesus marvel at your faith or your unbelief?
- Unbelief must be a monstrous sin causing Christ to marvel.

We never read that Jesus marveled at art or architecture or even the wonders of creation. He never marveled at human ingenuity or invention. He didn't marvel at the piety of the Jewish people or the military dominance of the Roman Empire.

- But Jesus did marvel at faith — when it was present in an unexpected place, and when it was absent where it should have been.

Jesus went about the villages teaching in a regular pattern... if someone wanted to hear Him teach, they could find Him. He did not let the rejection by His countrymen hinder Him; He got on with the business of teaching and ministry.

Mark 6:7-13 – The twelve are sent out preaching.

And He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits. He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff; no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts; but to wear sandals, and not to put on two tunics. Also He said to them, "In whatever place you enter a house, stay there till you depart from that place. And whoever will not receive you nor hear you, when you depart from there, shake off the dust under your feet as a testimony against them. Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them.

When the Disciples had learned enough about Jesus' message, He *send them out two by two*: In John 20:21, Jesus said, *as the Father has sent Me, I also send you.*

- Jesus sent out His disciples to do the same things that He did: preach, heal the sick, and free people from demonic possession.
- This hands-on training under the direct supervision of Jesus would have helped prepare them to do the church planting activities He called them to do after His resurrection and ascension to the Father.

Why do you think Jesus sent them out two-by-two?

There is wisdom in traveling with a companion... Ecclesiastes 4:12 – *Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken.* The two disciples had a third in God who was with them.

Jesus *commanded them to take nothing for the journey*: The disciples didn't need anything fancy to preach a simple message. Too much stuff would get in the way of their urgent message.

Also, there was a rule of the Jewish rabbis that you could not enter the temple area with a staff, shoes, or a moneybag to avoid even the appearance of being engaged in any other business than the service of the Lord.

- The disciples were doing holy work (preaching the gospel and bringing God's healing) so they should not give the impression they might have another motive.

Also, traveling light kept them dependent upon God. They had to trust the Lord for everything if they didn't take much with them.

- If the preacher doesn't trust God, how can he tell others to trust Him?

Next, Jesus prepared His disciples for the inevitable rejection by some... Their job as preachers wasn't to change people's minds. They were to persuasively present the message; but if their audience didn't receive it — they should leave, shaking the very dust from their feet as they left.

In that day, if Jewish people had to go to a Gentile city, they would shake the dust off their feet as they left.

- It was a gesture that said, "We don't want to take anything from this Gentile city with us."
- Essentially, Jesus told them to regard a Jewish city that rejects their message as if it were a Gentile city.

The application for us is that we should not spend time trying to convince someone who rejects the good news of Christ if they have rejected Him. As Jesus said...

Matthew 7:6 – Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces.

Our role is to simply plant and water seeds of truth. Paul put it this way...

1 Corinthians 3:6 – I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase

Jesus added that for those who rejected their message, *it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gommorah in the day of judgment*: The implication is that some will be judged more severely than others. Of course, none will have it good in hell; but it is biblical that there are degrees of punishment in hell...

Luke 12:47 – that servant who knew his master's will, and did not do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.

The disciples went out and preached as Jesus commanded them. To preach simply means to proclaim, to announce the good news of salvation to them.

- Some of the best and most effective preaching never happens inside a church. It happens when followers of Jesus are one-on-one with others, talking about what Jesus did for them.
- When the disciples went out to preach, they did not create their message; they simply passed on the message they had already heard from Jesus.

Isaiah 55:11 – So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Among the things the disciples would have preached is that everyone needs to repent, to turn from their sin that separates them from God.

- They didn't tell men to repent so much as they preached in such a way as to produce repentance.

Besides preaching, they *anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them*: There is another reference to anointing with oil for healing in James 5:14-15.

- anointing with oil was a picture of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but it may also have had a medicinal purpose in that day.

Let's take a look at the third rejection of God that resulted in the death of John the Baptist...

Since the story of his death is the first and only time John the Baptist is addressed in the book of Mark, it is instructive to review who he was...

John's adult life was characterized by devotion and surrender to Jesus Christ and His kingdom. He described himself as a "*lone voice in the wilderness*" (John 1:23). He boldly proclaimed the coming of the Messiah to a people who desperately needed a Savior.

While John was known as "the Baptist," he was in fact the first prophet called by God since Malachi some 400 years earlier. John's coming was foretold in Isaiah 40:3 – *the voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God."*

John was God's special ambassador to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. As Israel expected Elijah to return before "*the great and dreadful day of the Lord*" (Malachi 3:14), John the Baptist was a spiritual type of Elijah who heralded the first advent of the Messiah as God's Suffering Servant. Indeed, Jesus acknowledged this about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:14 when He said this about him, *if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come.*

John's birth was miraculous. He was born of elderly parents who had never been able to have children (Luke 1:7). The angel Gabriel announced to Zechariah, a Levitical priest, that he would have a son to be named John.

John was related to Jesus, as His mother Mary and John's mother Elizabeth were relatives (Luke 1:36). When Mary was carrying Jesus in her womb, she visited Elizabeth, and John leapt in his mother's womb for joy at being in the presence of the unborn Messiah (Luke 1:39-45).

As an adult John lived a rugged life in the mountainous area of Judea, between the city of Jerusalem and the Dead Sea. He wore clothes made of camel's hair, the typical garb of a prophet. His diet consisted of locusts and wild honey (Matthew 3:4). John lived a simple life as he focused on the kingdom work set before him.

John the Baptist's ministry grew in popularity, as recounted in Matthew 3:5-6: *"People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River."*

To be baptized by John was to admit your sin and repent of it—which was, of course, a great way to be prepared for the Savior's coming.

The general opinion of John the Baptist was that he was a prophet of God (Matthew 14:5), and many people may have thought that he was the Messiah. John made it clear that was not the case and his message was simple and direct: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"* (Matthew 3:2). John knew that, once Jesus appeared on the scene, his work would be all but finished. He willingly gave up the spotlight to Jesus, saying, *"He must become greater; I must become less"* (John 3:30).

There was a great example of humility seen in both Jesus and John in Matthew 3:13-15. Jesus came from Galilee to be baptized by John in the River Jordan. John rightly recognized that the sinless Son of God needed no baptism of repentance and that he was certainly not worthy to baptize his own Savior. But Jesus answered John's concern by requesting baptism *"to fulfill all righteousness,"* meaning that He was identifying Himself with the sinners for whom He would ultimately sacrifice Himself.

Alright, with that background on John the Baptist, let's look at Mark's account of his death...

Mark 6:14-16 – Herod reacts to Jesus' ministry

Now King Herod heard of Him, for His name had become well known. And he said, "John the Baptist is risen from the dead, and therefore these powers are at work in him." Others said, "It is Elijah." And others said, "It is the Prophet, or like one of the prophets." But when Herod heard, he said, "This is John, whom I beheaded; he has been raised from the dead!"

Mark used the title King Herod because it was the local custom to call him king, or even more likely he used it ironically... Emperor Augustus denied the title "king" to Herod. Goaded by the ambitious Herodias, Herod pressed for the title again and again until he so offended the emperor's court that he was eventually dismissed as a traitor.

Some people thought John was Elijah, because it was prophesied Elijah would come before the Messiah did (Malachi 4:5). Others thought He was the Prophet whom Moses said would come after him (Deuteronomy 18:15).

But Herod feared Jesus was John the Baptist who he had killed by beheading him. Herod's confusion came from his own guilty conscience.

- It is not possible to see clearly who Jesus is when a person is in sin and rebellion.

Mark 6:17-29 – The sordid death of John the Baptist

For Herod himself had sent and laid hold of John, and bound him in prison for the sake of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife; for he had married her. For John had said to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." Therefore Herodias held it against him and wanted to kill him, but she could not; for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him. And when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly. Then an opportune day came when Herod on his birthday gave a feast for his nobles, the high officers, and the chief men of Galilee. And when Herodias' daughter herself came in and danced, and pleased Herod and those who sat with him, the king said to the girl, "Ask me whatever you want, and I will give it to you." He also swore to her, "Whatever you ask me, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom." So she went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask?" And she said, "The head of John the Baptist!" Immediately she came in with haste to the king and asked, saying, "I want you to give me at once the head of John the Baptist on a platter." And the king was exceedingly sorry; yet, because of the oaths and because of those who sat with him, he did not want to refuse her. Immediately the king sent an executioner and commanded his head to be brought. And he went and

beheaded him in prison, brought his head on a platter, and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother. When his disciples heard of it, they came and took away his corpse and laid it in a tomb.

Herod had bound John the Baptist in prison for his bold rebuke of his sin. At the same time, Herod did not want to kill John out of fear of the multitudes — and because he knew John to be a just and holy man.

When John preached repentance, he did not spare the rich and powerful. He called Herod and his wife Herodias to repent, because Herodias had been the wife of Herod's brother Philip.

Herod had been fascinated with John and liked to listen to him. But John's word left him perplexed, and in anguish. He had found a strange pleasure in the authoritative preaching of this holy man, whose rough life gave added power to what he had to say. Herod was too weak to follow John's counsel, but he nevertheless felt compelled to listen.

Herodias' daughter shamelessly danced before Herod and his friends, winning favor and the offer of a special gift. Such risqué dancing was unprecedented for women of rank and respectability. Such a performance would have normally been left to the professionals.

Herodias' daughter consulted her mom about what gift she should request from Herod. The reply was, "*The head of John the Baptist!*" The immediate reply of Herodias showed that her mother had planned this out all along.

- Herodias knew her husband and knew this situation would help her get what she wanted.

Herod was sorry to get this request but he had to comply because of his promise before his friends. Also, he'd have recognized that his wife was behind this and knew better than to cross her.

It wasn't long before the tyrant Herod suffered the consequences of rejecting God's messenger. In order to take his brother's wife Herodias, Herod put away his first wife, a princess from a neighboring kingdom to the east. Her father was offended, and came against Herod with an army, defeating him in battle. Then Herod's brother Agrippa accused him of treason against Rome, and he was banished to the distant Roman province of Gaul, where Herod and Herodias committed suicide.

Rejecting God never ends well. Those who rejected Jesus in His hometown when they had the opportunity to recognize Him as the Savior are surely regretting having passed up that opportunity. As well as those who rejected Jesus' disciples. And though Herod knew better, he succumbed to worldly pressure to reject God's messenger John.

The application to us is this: When the Holy Spirit convicts us of something we need to, it would behoove us to respond. Even those of us who've accepted Jesus Christ as our Savior, who have recognized that His death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin can still reject God on a daily basis. Being saved is not the end of our spiritual journey, it is the beginning of our relationship with Him. The more we can be responsive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, the closer we'll be to our Lord and the more abundant life will be.

Alright, what applications or other observations do you have from our look at the first part of Mark 6 today?

- Don't fall into the pride trap of thinking we know Jesus; God excels in working outside whatever box we put Him in.
- When we experience rejection representing the Lord, move on... there are others who need to know Him.
- Don't succumb to worldly pressures to do what we know is wrong; that never ends well.
- Be aware that everyday there are opportunities to involve Jesus in our lives; we should not reject Him but take advantage of those opportunities.