

Jesus Messiah: Seeing Christ In The Gospel Of Mark

*“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
(Mark 1:15 ESV)*

*And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said,
“Truly this man was the Son of God!”
(Mark 15:38–39 ESV)*

He Called The Twelve And Began To Send Them

June 25th, 2017

Mark 6:7-13

Rev. Paul Carter

Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles to Mark 6:7; that’s on page 841 in your new Bibles. This is a really interesting passage for a variety of reasons. Most scholars and commentators agree that this passage represents a new stage in Jesus’ ministry and that it is characterized by an increased sharing of the load with the disciples. Jesus knows that he is not going to be on the earth forever – and he has no intention of being on the earth forever. He intends to leave – to ascend to the Father’s right hand and to pour out his Spirit on the church – that’s the long term plan – and so he begins to increase the weight of responsibility and authority that is being shouldered by the disciples. Up until this point the disciples have been “with him” – now he begins to send them out and in doing so he gives them some very interesting instructions and while the specific details may seem very much rooted in the first century – there are principles here that we must attend to in every generation of the church.

Some of you here have done the IMB missionary training program that was developed in India – they use Luke’s version of this story as the foundation for that training. They walk you through this story – in Luke’s Gospel – line by line in order to build a philosophy of missions. And so they should.

One commentator puts it this way:

“No doubt Mark understood the incident as the foundation event on which all subsequent Christian missionary activity was based.”¹

So the early church understood this passage as in some way providing a blueprint for all subsequent missionary activity – you aren’t reading it right if you aren’t looking for that. And so we will. We will work our way through this passage, line by line and then we will try and organize our discoveries into some actionable imperatives at the end.

Hear now the Word of the Lord, beginning at verse 7:

And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two...

We have to begin here. He called THE TWELVE – this number 12 was not an accident and to understand this story and how it functioned in the early church we need to know what that number means. It clearly meant something. You remember that at the end of the Gospels and at the start of The Book of Acts there is some consternation about the fact that with Judas having apostasized and killed himself, there was now only 11 disciples, and apparently, that just wouldn’t do. Have you ever asked yourself why not? Why not 11? Why not 14? Why did the number 12 matter?

If you’ve been following along with the Into The Word podcast then you know that the number “12” keeps coming up again and again and again. For example, when John is saying the Holy City – the New Jerusalem that descends from heaven to the earth at the end of human history, he says:

It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed— 13 on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. 14 And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (Revelation 21:12–14 ESV)

12 and 12! Almost every scholar you can find will agree without a second’s hesitation that this is intended to symbolize the whole people of God – Old Testament and New. The New Jerusalem is the whole people of God! It is built upon promises made and the Gospel proclaimed! That’s the idea! The patriarchs – the 12 men who became the 12 tribes – they are the ones who received the

¹ D.E. Nineham, *Saint Mark*, The Penguin New Testament Commentaries. (London: Penguin Group, 1992), 167.

promises of God. The 12 Apostles are the ones who were sent out to declare that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ – are you seeing that? The word “apostle” is used here in Revelation 21 – the word literally means “sent ones”. And so that brings us back to Mark 6:7.

And he called the twelve and began to send them out...

Here’s the point – the 12 represent the Gospel mission of the entire church. Jesus doesn’t send out the few, the brave and the best – he sends out the entire church! And that is remarkable because at this point in the story most of the disciples are as dumb as a bag of hammers! They have not distinguished themselves well – in fact only a couple of the disciples distinguish themselves at all and yet Jesus sends them out – in total – each and every one.

I love what James Edwards says about this – I think he is exactly right. He says:

The sending of the Twelve appears premature and may catch us by surprise, for the record of the disciples to date has not been reassuring. Heretofore they have impeded Jesus’ mission (1:36–39), become exasperated with him (4:38; 5:31), and even opposed him (3:21). Their perception of Jesus has been — and will continue to be — marked by misunderstanding (8:14–21). The willingness of Jesus to abide the intractable nature and behavior of his followers is further testimony to his divine humility.²

I think he hits the nail on the head. This does seem premature to us – the disciples do seem totally inadequate to the task – they don’t seem to have a firm grip on the Gospel – and yet Jesus sends them out in all their weakness and immaturity. I feel rebuked by that. I feel like that seems to indicate that we wait too long before launching people into ministry. We are over inclined to professionalize. We have abnormalized mission and evangelism – making it something that only the well trained and very gifted are supposed to engage. No. We have it wrong. This passage says that mission and evangelism are tasks given to the entire church and tasks to be engaged at every level of spiritual maturity and ministry giftedness. If you’ve been called – you are sent.

Now the text also says that he sent them out two by two – what does that mean?

Well most scholars agree here that there are a couple of reasons for this missiological principle. The first reason has to do with credibility. The Bible says:

James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 177-178.

Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established. (Deuteronomy 19:15 ESV)

If you are saying something nobody else is saying you are probably wrong and you are not to be trusted. But two people telling the same story demand a hearing. So that is probably one of the main reasons behind this command from Jesus.

But another reason likely has to do with human inadequacy and complementarity. No one person has all of the gifts necessary for the effective proclamation of the Gospel and for the building up of the church. God makes all of us strategically deficient to draw us into missional community. We need each other! Even the most gifted guy in the Bible knew enough not to do ministry on his own. The Apostle Paul always travelled with a companion and he chose his companions wisely. Paul was a once in a generation mind and he had the firmness of an Old Testament prophet. He frightened people! He wrote to one church and said: “When I next come to you shall I bring the love or shall I bring my stick!” Paul was not a diplomat – the brother was firm and frightening and so he travelled with some people people – people like Barnabas and Timothy. That was wise – the church needs firm minded truth tellers and they need gracious and approachable people people and there aren’t too many people who are good at both and so we work in team.

Alright let’s get back into the text. He sent them out two by two:

and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

Now scholars disagree here as to whether this means simply that the Apostolic Gospel functioned to dispel and displace demonic powers or whether it refers to a specific gift given to the Apostles to command obedience from demonic spirits. The text doesn’t say explicitly how this worked and so we should be cautious as well. Let’s just agree that where the Apostolic Gospel is embraced the devil is correspondingly displaced. And let’s also agree that by his Spirit Jesus shares his authority and power with his people according to his Sovereign will and purpose. I don’t think we need to get any finer in our exegesis than that.

Verse 8 goes on to say:

He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts— 9 but to wear sandals and not put on two tunics.

Now, these are very unusual instructions. You might even argue that it is unwise to go on a trip without a change of clothes, or money for food and lodging – what in the world is Jesus trying to communicate here? Well, this is one of those places where it is very helpful to consult with the other Gospels. As Pastor Levi mentioned last week, it is an incredible blessing to have multiple versions of these stories. The Gospel of Mark represents Peter’s recollection of these events – but thanks be to God we also have Matthew’s recollections of these events and most scholars believe that Matthew wrote his account with Mark’s account open in front of him. You can pretty much drop Mark’s Gospel into Matthew’s Gospel – its almost all there – but then you’ll notice that there are 12 more chapters – meaning Matthew tells a more expansive version of most of Mark’s stories. He provides details he thought might be helpful and it appears that here as he read Mark’s account he thought that future readers might appreciate a little help in figuring out why Jesus gave these strange instructions and so right after the laundry list of things we aren’t supposed to take with us on missions Matthew adds this very helpful phrase:

for the laborer deserves his food. (Matthew 10:10 ESV)

Do you see that? Jesus is telling the disciples to travel light so that the villages they visit have the opportunity to express their interest in the Gospel BY INVESTING IN IT. Jesus is saying that if people are not interested enough in the message of the Gospel to support Gospel ministry then move on! They’re obviously not worthy of it.

Listen, there is a point within a point here. Jesus is saying that you can measure interest and priority by looking at investment and expenditure. I’m not reaching here – Jesus taught that in the Parable of the Pearl. He said:

the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, 46 who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew 13:45–46 ESV)

Are you seeing that? This principle of missiology is just the active application of the Parable of the Pearl! You can tell whether or not people value the Gospel by whether or not they invest materially in it. Its not rocket science. I mean think about it for a second. Ask yourself this: What

does it say to God if you invest more in Netflix, cable television, your cell phone and going to movies than you do in Gospel ministry in your local context? Think about that. Do you give more to the Gospel ministry in your city than you give to Netflix, Rogers and Cineplex – yes or no? Because this principle – like the parable of the pearl – says that God looks at how you spend your money and he says that if you want to find faith then you follow the money. Money goes to what people care about and if they don't care about the Gospel – then leave.

Now, we need to be thoughtful in how we apply that. The Apostle Paul advocated for this general rule. He said:

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Timothy 5:18 ESV)

He's quoting Jesus here – from this story in Matthew's version – and yet, Paul said that sometimes when breaking into a whole new culture he would refuse to take any payment or support from that culture until the church was firmly established. This actually caused offense to the church in Corinth because Paul planted that church while being supported by the church in Philippi and other churches in Macedonia and the Corinthians interpreted that as Paul saying that they weren't a mature church – capable of supporting their own ministry – and Paul had to do some fast talking to explain what his motives were for that decision. So Paul embraced the principle but he understood it as having a time frame and a few logical exceptions – but it's the principle we are interested in today and the principle is this: Gospel ministry should be supported by the people who are receiving it. Therefore the goal of foreign missions ought to be to move towards some measure of sustainability as soon as possible.

Our friends at IMB have recognized the value of this principle and they embedded it in their missiology. When they send missionaries into unreached villages they send them very light. They don't send them with a full set of pots and pans and a month's worth of food. They send them in light and so we heard missionaries talking about having to go around and ask the neighbours if they could borrow a pot to boil rice in. And they reported that this was a good way to make relationships and a good way to lower tensions. Its hard to be intimidated by someone who doesn't have a pot to make rice in. And it also gave them a chance to gauge the interest of the village in the Gospel they were bringing.

There is a lot of wisdom here and a lot to think about, but let's move on to the next verse. Verse 10 says:

10 And he said to them, "Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you depart from there.

This one is reasonably easy to make sense of. The community should support Gospel ministry and Gospel workers in a reasonable way – but the Gospel workers should not be motivated by the quest for greater and greater hospitality and support. In very practical terms I would apply this passage in conversation with a local church pastor by saying: "If your church of 50 people can't or won't pay you a decent salary then move on. 50 people tithing 10% of their income ought to be able to support a building and a pastor. If they won't then move on and serve people more interested in the Gospel."

But then I would also say to a pastor: "But don't you dare leave your ministry and go to a bigger church just to earn a bigger salary. If there are people in your community who are hungry for the Gospel and who are taking reasonable care of you and your family then you should stay. Until Jesus calls you elsewhere – you should say. Don't move for the money. This is not a profession, this is a calling."

Verse 11 says:

And if any place will not receive you and they will not listen to you, when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them."

Now, this requires a little bit of unpacking because the principle comes wrapped inside a cultural idiom – a local expression – that is now unfamiliar to us. In Bible times an observant Jew from someplace far away like Rome or Athens or Tarsus, would go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the religious festivals and when he crossed over into Jewish territory he would smack his sandals together as a way of decontaminating himself from Gentile impurities. Therefore for Jesus to tell his disciples to smack their sandals together as they left an uninterested village is to declare those villages now to be OUTSIDE the covenant community. I love how William Lane puts it, he says:

"This provision indicates that the coming of the disciples, like that of Jesus himself, had the character of sifting and gathering the true people of God."³

³ William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1974), 209.

You remember Jesus saying that about himself right? He said:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. 37 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (Matthew 10:34–38 ESV)

Jesus said that he came to cut through humanity like a hot knife through butter. He was going to come at people and force people to decide and in their deciding they would declare themselves either to be worthy or unworthy of the kingdom of God – and now he says that about the ministry of the disciples. He says to the 12: “As people respond to your preaching they put themselves inside or outside the covenant people of God”. That is a remarkable statement. That is the dignity and significance of Gospel proclamation. Your mouth contains a sword that will divide the nations and that will gather the whole people of God!

12 So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

Notice that everywhere, the summary of early Christian preaching is simply “REPENT!” Mark was almost as brief when summarizing the preaching of Jesus. He said in Mark 1:

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, 15 and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14–15 ESV)

Repent and believe – that was the essence of early Christian preaching – would that it were so again today. Today we are too often told that we can't be that bold with people – with unchurched people. Well, let's state the obvious, these people in Mark 6 are about as unchurched as it is possible to be and yet the disciples said REPENT. They didn't have time for 6 years of Chicken Soup For The Soul. They didn't think it necessary to preach for 6 years on personal finance, or how to have a happy life – they preached what MATTERED and what mattered was that sin separates us from a holy God and if you die in your sin you will be apart from God for all eternity – so we better just cut to the chase!

Have you ever heard of the sermon that launched the Great Awakening in North America? It was called “Sinners In The Hands Of An Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards. In that sermon he told

men, women, boys and girls that they hung over the flames of hell by the finest of threads. If they died today, if they had a heart attack or choked on their lunch and they were not reconciled to God through the blood of Jesus Christ then their thread would snap and they would descend into the darkness and fire of hell there to wail and gnash their teeth forever.

He didn't have time for 50 sermons on social media or how to be a good friend. Souls hung in the balance.

Where did we get this stupid idea that we have dance around the obvious and the urgent? Here is the obvious: sin is a serious problem. God is a holy God. We are a broken people – and that is a serious problem! That's obvious! You don't have to apologize for that. If your friend doubts that people are broken just sit down together and watch the news for 30 minutes. Humanity is off the map! We have lost our minds and we have lost our way – but God hasn't changed. He is still holy – so how shall we go home? That's the issue. That's what we need to be talking about and I don't think that it is too hard for unchurched people to understand. Its obvious and its urgent because human life is but a vapor. We are here today and gone tomorrow so we better just cut to the chase. That's what the disciples do.

they went out and proclaimed that people should repent.

I don't think Jesus intended that to serve as a historical footnote. I think it meant to be an authoritative example.

The text goes on to say:

And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them. (Mark 6:7–13 ESV)

They preached REPENTANCE and they cared about people. They cared about the freedom of their souls and they cared about the health and well being of their bodies. And we should do the same.

Now I mentioned off the top that you aren't reading this story right if you are not looking for a blueprint for Christian ministry and I think that having worked our way slowly and carefully through the text we ought to be able to easily identify the main principles and imperatives.

1. Do mission in team

Let's work together – every member a minister. Everyone doing their part, everyone supporting the process. Brothers and sisters, let's never professionalize the Christian ministry; let's do this in team.

2. Work towards sustainability

In every ministry there should be some plan for getting people and projects to the place where they move from consuming to contributing. Obviously there needs to be a timeline – but that timeline can't stretch on forever. Very practically, for how long should RCC be supported by givings from “up the hill”? For some time period I should think – but not forever. Eventually the folks down there need to indicate their interest in the Gospel the same way everybody else does. Same thing with work overseas. While there will ALWAYS be a place for sharing between rich believers and poor – as per the Jerusalem Offering in the early church – nevertheless the goal ought to be to move native churches towards self sustainability. Otherwise all we're doing is Christian Colonialism. There has to be a plan and a timeline for getting people and projects to a place of sustainability.

3. Know when to move on

If people aren't interested and if they refuse to be invested, then at some point we've got to move on to people who are more likely to respond. Now I think this calls for discernment. There is a timeline here again, there are some reasonable exceptions – but there is an important principle. At some point, we have to move on! The Gospel of Jesus Christ is urgent business.

4. Preach repentance

I refuse to buy into the perpetual merge lane philosophy of ministry. I refuse to preach Chicken Soup for the Soul when people are going to hell all around me. I don't want to play games and I don't want to take unnecessary detours. Jesus went right at it. He preached that people had a sin problem and that he was the Savior of the world and he told his disciples to do the same and I see no reason to modify his instructions.

5. Care about the whole person – body and soul

My dear friends, I think sometimes we make ministry far more complicated than it really is. I think 90% of ministry is preaching the Gospel and caring about people – I really do. I know we've got decisions to make about buildings to purchase or not to purchase, money to spend or not to spend – and I hope we do our due diligence on those decisions, but can I tell you something? Whatever we decide it will not sink or float the cause of Christ in this community. Those things are deck chairs and frills. If plan A isn't good, give me plan B and we'll go with that – but let me tell you this – none of it matters if we aren't preaching the Gospel and caring about people.

We've got to care about their souls and we've got to care about their bodies.

That's your game plan right there; that's your model for ministry, and this is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God. Let's pray together.