

**UNIT 9 LESSON 4****MARK 6:1 - 7:23**

The passage for this lesson includes three related topics,

1. The reaction of local villagers to Jesus (6:1-13).
2. The growing official rejection of Jesus (6:14-29), (7:1-23).
3. Further insights by the Twelve into the nature of their Leader (6:30-52).

1. HOW THE LOCAL VILLAGERS REACT TO JESUS (6:1-13).**a) Mark 6:1-6.**

After the good response of the sick woman (Chapter 5) Jesus returned to his home town - Nazareth. The wording indicates that he did not return as a son back home for a day or two with his parents. He obviously came to Nazareth as a teacher, with his group of disciples, in order to win a hearing, and to propagate his message.

In spite of verse 4, which could be taken to mean that he half expected a poor response, Jesus was bitterly disappointed (v.6) and surprised by their lack of faith. The only exhibition of divine power that he was able to give was to heal a few sick folk who were humbled enough by pain and sense of need to believe in him (v.5).

b) Mark 6:7-13.

The second incident in this section deals with the preaching tours of the Twelve. It was a specific mission. Particular provisions were made to govern their equipment and programme. There is a general attitude of utter seriousness about the message - they were not to tolerate flippancy or indifference (verse 11). They were to take only what was strictly necessary for life (verse 8,9). Notice that these provisions and instructions were only in force for this mission. Check this out in Luke 22:36.

It would appear that Jesus made this deliberate effort to propagate his message by means of his disciples for two reasons. First, to give his disciples much needed experience. Second, because of his rejection in Nazareth he found it necessary to cover the rest of the district as well. Evidently the mission was a success (verses 13,30).



2. GROWING OFFICIAL REJECTION OF JESUS.

a) Herod's rejection of John. (Mark 6:14-29).

Up to this time we may presume that news of Jesus' activities had not merited the attention of the highest authorities in the land. He, of course, had been under surveillance (2:6f, 3:22 etc.) but now, as a direct result of the mission of the Twelve, Herod had his attention drawn to Jesus (6:14).

According to Leviticus 18:16, 20:21, Herod Antipas' action in marrying his brother's wife, was a sin. John the Baptist felt it necessary to speak out against it. As a result John died.

The compiler of Mark's Gospel has included this piece of background on John the Baptist as a solemn reminder of the issues that were at stake in the mission of the disciples.

b) Jewish Leaders Attack Jesus and His Disciples. (Mark 7:1-23)

This time the attack on Jesus comes from Pharisees and teachers of the law (v.2). They attacked his disciples on a point of ritual, not one of faith, and a point of ritual drawn not directly from the law, but from the body of explanatory tradition that was growing up round the law.

This explanatory "tradition" is an unfortunate tendency which happens in most religions. The zealous devotees of the religion find it easy to expand the general principles of their religion and create rules for every conceivable occurrence in daily life. They insist these rules are fixed and authoritative for all time and on all adherents. They make obedience to these rules necessary for salvation.

There are two further developments. First, the study of these laws becomes the most important occupation of the devotee. Second, the law can even be used in a way which is quite the opposite of the original religious principle.

This final point is the problem Jesus highlights in verse 9. It all revolves around the word "corban". A man has an obligation to care for his parents. This obligation can become a costly nuisance so he looks for a way out. He finds it in the principle of "corban". This is the word used for a gift consecrated to God for religious purposes (Lev. 1:2, 22:27, 23:14, Num. 7:25, Ezek. 20:28, 40-43). It indicates that whatever was set apart could not thereafter be used for any other purpose. So we see how easy it would be to avoid one's obligations. Simply declare a sum of money "corban" and it cannot be used for ordinary things, such as caring for elderly parents. The supposedly higher authority of the "corban" rule overrides the clear teaching of the Law about honouring father and mother. Meanwhile until God calls on it the owner can still use it him/herself.

Jesus rightly challenged the practice. But such is the strength of this unfortunate tendency in all religions that people cannot easily see the point of Jesus' challenge.



3. FURTHER INSIGHTS BY THE TWELVE INTO THE NATURE OF JESUS AND HIS TEACHING (MARK 6:30-52).

We now return to the section omitted above. There are two incidents and they are connected by verse 52.

a) The Feeding of the Five Thousand.

This is obviously a significant incident as it is recorded in all the four Gospels. Read through these other accounts and see if you can sense the differences. John's account is quite different, with its long explanation. (John 6:25-71).

First there is a short report of a foiled attempt by Jesus to get the disciples (here called apostles) apart for debriefing and refreshment.

Several topics in this story stand out. Jesus recognises the need for rest, yet is prepared to meet the pressing needs of the people in preference to his own. He sees people as shepherd-less sheep, needing a leader, guide and friend. The disciples learn not to rely upon their own reasoning, yet they are taught that, with their 'little', God can work miracles providing all that they have is consecrated to him. Yet God does not work without the aid of men - it is the disciples who have to organise the people and serve them.

Mark's Gospel has several similarities in wording between the feeding of the five thousand and the Last Supper... (Mark 14:22ff) and we are meant to see the parallel - the first disciples enjoyed the provision of the Lord with the multiplied loaves and the continuing church celebrates the Lord's provision of the Bread of Life in the regularly recurring Communion.

b) Walking on the Water (Mark 6:45-52).

This incident again underlines the fear and uncertainty of the disciples in the face of such an amazing set of circumstances. Yet there is something compelling about Jesus which made them cling to him. This is a common enough experience for people, - to be certain of their need of God but yet not always prepared for what they find.

QUESTION 1:

In Mark 6:1-6 what is at the root of the townspeople's attitude? How does their unbelief affect Jesus' ministry among them? Does this apply today?

QUESTION 2:

Read Mark 6:7-13. Compare the message the disciples preach with John's message (Mark 1:4) and Jesus' message (1:15). What do the disciples do in addition to preaching? Where do they get this power? How will their ministry help to spread Jesus' message?

**QUESTION 3:**

What gives rise to the discussion which begins in Mark 7:5? How does Jesus handle the criticism? What accusation does he make? What is the point of the quotation from Isaiah? What choice does Jesus say the Pharisees have made?

QUESTION 4:

In verses 14-22 Jesus goes on to explain explicitly to the crowd and then to the disciples the nature of morality and religion.

Why do you think verse 19 includes the section in brackets? What may it say about the original readers of this Gospel? What message was it meant to convey to them? Do you think it has anything to do with Acts 10?

QUESTION 5:

Read Mark 6:30-44. Imagine how the disciples feel now that they have returned from their trips. What does Jesus suggest? What ruins their plans for a day off? How does Jesus react to this interruption in plans? What does he see as the need of this crowd?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

We tend to think that if trouble comes to us it must mean we are not doing God's will. Read Mark 6:30-52. How did Jesus' disciples get into this distressing situation on the sea? (v. 47-50). What other frustrations had occurred that day? What can you learn from this?