

06 – The Cost of Following a Different Kind of King

Scripture reading: Mark 6:6b-56.

I. The reality of persecution – the cost of following the Messiah (6:6b-30):

- A. The cost of discipleship Markan sandwich:
 - 1. *Bread (part 1):* Jesus sends out the Twelve (6:6b-13).
 - 2. *Filling:* Herod executes John the Baptist (6:14-29).
 - 3. *Bread (part 2):* The Twelve returns to Jesus (6:30).
 - 4. *Toothpick:* “Jesus told them” (6:8); “the apostles told Jesus” (6:30).
- B. *Bread (part 1) – Jesus sends out the Twelve (6:6b-13):*
 - 1. The performance of the Twelve, thus far, leaves much to be desired of; yet Jesus sends them out as his official representatives (6:6b-7).
 - 2. The advantages of doing ministry in pairs:
 - a. For keeping company, counsel, accountability, and complementary gifts.
 - b. In the case of the apostles, it was the most beneficial for their Jewish audience (cf. Deut. 19:15).
 - 3. The ministry of the Twelve is accompanied by the signs of the inbreaking of the kingdom – authority over the unclean spirits (Mark 6:7b; cf. T. Levi 18:12).
 - 4. Doing ministry by faith (6:8-9):
 - a. Things to bring: staff, belt, sandals, and a tunic (cf. Exod. 12:11).
 - b. Things to leave behind: bread, bag, and money.
 - 5. Attitude towards the Jewish hearers (6:10-11):
 - a. The apostles are to be grateful to their hosts (6:10).
 - b. Those who reject the apostolic proclamation are to be thought of as unclean Gentile unbelievers – salvation is by faith alone (6:11; cf. Neh. 5:13; Acts 18:6).
 - 6. The apostles obey Jesus to proclaim his message of repentance and spread the wholesomeness of the inbreaking kingdom of God (6:12-13).
- C. *Filling – Herod executes John the Baptist (6:14-29):*
 - 1. Herod Antipas, Herodias, and Salome:
 - a. Herod the Great (73 BCE – c. 4 BCE) executed Aristobulus and Alexander, his sons through Mariamne I, on charges of high treason (7 BCE).
 - b. Herod Philip, son of Mariamne II (daughter of Simon Boethus the high priest), married Herodias, the daughter of his half-brother Aristobulus.
 - c. Herod Philip and Herodias had a daughter by the name of Salome.

- d. Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great through Malthace, persuaded Herodias to divorce Herod Philip and to marry him; this required Antipas to divorce the daughter of Aretas the king of Nabatea.¹
 - e. Aretas defeated Antipas in 36 CE; Herodias persuaded Antipas to appeal to Emperor Caligula but the emperor banished Antipas to Lyons instead; Herodias followed Antipas in exile rather than clemency from Caligula.²
 - 2. Amidst speculations of who Jesus might be; Herod Antipas believes that Jesus is the second coming of John the Baptist whom he beheaded (6:14-16).
 - 3. Herod Antipas imprisoned John the Baptist (6:17-20):
 - a. In a flashback, Herod imprisoned John because the latter opposed to his marriage to Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip (6:17-18).
 - b. Herodias wanted to execute John but Herod kept him safe; although Herod loathed John's message of righteousness, he was also at the same time captivated by it (6:19-20).
 - 4. Herod Antipas' birthday feast and the execution of John the Baptist (6:21-29):
 - a. During Herod's birthday feast, Salome danced for the guests, consisting of the Galilean elite class; her dance pleased Herod who hastily promised her "up to half her kingdom" (6:21-23).
 - b. Salome consulted with Herodias who demanded for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (6:24-25).
 - c. Bound by his oath in front of his guests, Herod reluctantly ordered for John to be executed – Herod presented John's head to Salome who, in turn, gave it to Herodias (6:26-28).
 - d. John's disciples took the risk to retrieve the body of the condemned "criminal" (6:29).
- D. *Bread (part 2)* – The Twelve returns and reports to Jesus their activities (6:30).

II. Feeding of the five thousand: a different king and a different kind of banquet (6:31-44):

- A. Revolution is afoot (6:31-33):
 - 1. Jesus and his disciples are unable to rest even when they attempt to go to a desolate place due to "*many* ($\piολλοι$) were coming and going" (6:31-32).
 - 2. The *many* people manage to track down Jesus party's destination and get there ahead of them (6:33).
- B. Jesus sees himself as the shepherd of Israel (6:34):
 - 1. A compassionate teacher-leader like Moses (6:34b; Isa. 63:11).
 - 2. A compassionate shepherd-king like David (Ezek. 34:1-24).

¹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.136-137.

² Josephus, *Ant.* 18.109-119.

- C. The miracle of the feeding of the five thousand (Mark 6:35-43):
 - 1. The disciples suggest a practical solution but Jesus instructs them to feed the people, which seems like an unreasonable order (6:35-38).
 - 2. Jesus commands the people to sit down in groups on green grass by hundreds and by fifties, an allusion to God's provision for Israel in the wilderness, the formation of an army, and the eschatological feast of God's ingathered people (6:39-40; cf. Exod. 18:25; Num. 31:14; Isa. 25:6-9).
 - 3. Jesus multiplies the bread and fish (6:41; cf. 14:22):
 - a. He takes the five loaves (and the two fish).
 - b. He looks up to heaven and said a blessing.
 - c. He breaks the loaves (and the fish) and gives them to his disciples.
 - 4. Result of the feeding of the five thousand (6:42-44):
 - a. The five thousand is satisfied (6:42).
 - b. Each disciple has an extra basket full of broken pieces (6:43).
 - c. The five thousand people are men (*ἄνδρες*) (6:44).
- D. Comparison between Herod's and Jesus' feasts:
 - 1. Herod's feast is in a fortress/palace but Jesus' feast is at the hills of Galilee.
 - 2. Herod's feast is for the social elites but Jesus' feast is for the common people.
 - 3. Herod's feast is to bolster his own position with his guests but Jesus' feast is to minister to the needs of the sheep.
 - 4. Herod's feast results in murder but Jesus' feast is life-giving.

III. Jesus walks on water: the reason why one should follow this king (6:45-51):

- A. Jesus dismisses the revolutionary crowd (6:45-46):³
 - 1. He urgently compels (*εὐθὺς ἤναγκασεν*) his disciples to get into a boat and go before him to Bethsaida so that they do not become susceptible to the messianic euphoria of the crowd (6:45a).
 - 2. He disperses the crowd peacefully for he is not the political revolutionary messiah that they expected (6:45b; cf. John 6:14-15).
 - 3. He goes up to the mountain to pray – reaffirming his calling as the servant king (Mark 6:46; cf. 1:35; 14:35-39).⁴
- B. The disciples are being “tormented” (*βασανίζω*) at the oars by the wind (6:47-48a).
- C. Jesus walks on water (6:48b-52):

³ Follow the discussion on the Zealot movement in rural Galilee in M. Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period of Herod I until 70 A.D.*, trans. D. Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 56-59.

⁴ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 197.

1. On the fourth watch of the night (3-6 am; Roman division), Jesus walks on the sea toward the disciples (περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης = Job 9:8 LXX) – “he meant to pass by them” (ἡθελεν παρελθεῖν αὐτούς = Job 9:11 LXX) (Mark 6:48b; cf. Exod. 33:22 LXX; Ps. 77:19).
 2. Although Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible cannot be seen face-to-face, the disciples can see Jesus Christ, the embodiment and expression of Yahweh, but they are terrified because they think that they are seeing a ghost (φάντασμά) (6:49-50a).
 3. Jesus says, “Take heart, I AM (ἐγώ εἰμι; cf. Exod. 3:14). Do not be afraid (cf. Gen. 15:1; 21:7; 26:24; 43:23; 46:3) (Mark 6:50b).
 4. Jesus enters into the boat with them and the wind ceases (4:51a).
 5. The disciples are utterly astounded for they do not understand about the loaves, but their hearts are hardened (6:51b).
- D. The recipients of Mark’s gospel should choose to follow King Jesus instead of worldly powers be it the Roman emperor or his vassals, even at the cost of death, for Jesus is the embodiment of Yahweh who comes to feed his people and organise them into his heavenly army.

IV. Summary report on the inbreaking kingdom of Jesus the Messiah (6:53-56):

- A. Jesus and the disciples land at Gennesaret (probably blown off course from Bethsaida by the wind) (6:53).
- B. Like previous summary reports (1:35-39; 3:7-12), throngs of people come to Jesus to be healed (σώζω; “healed” or “saved”) by even touching the tassels sewn on the four edges of his garments (6:55-56).

V. Conclusion:

- A. Disciples of Jesus are called to be his official representatives to preach his message and to bring the wholesomeness of his kingdom to people.
- B. The cost of discipleship includes preparedness to pay the ultimate price of following Christ to martyrdom.
- C. Jesus’ kingdom contrasts fundamentally with worldly kingdoms – the powerful in the world glorifies themselves and oppresses the people; Christ gives himself to the people and provides for them.
- D. King Jesus is worth following not because of his ideals, per se, but that he is the sovereign God – the I AM.