



The Gospel of Mark - Chapter Six

II. Mark 1:14-8:26 - Demonstration of Jesus' Authority (continues)

II.b Mark 3:13-6:6a - Jesus' later Galilæan ministry (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Six

Jesus and his followers travelled to Nazareth, possibly to see his family members and certainly to teach the people there, many of whom had known Jesus since his childhood. These people could not reconcile the wisdom he displayed in his teaching and his remarkable miracles, with the carpenter's son they knew so well. Therefore, they became hostile and rejected him.

Jesus then extended the training of his apostles by sending them out in pairs on their first mission without him. He gave them the authority to teach, heal and drive out impure spirits, giving them strict instructions as to what they could and could not take along for the journey.

Rumours were spreading about who Jesus might be: the resurrected John the Baptist, the promised Elijah or another prophet sent by God like one of those in the OT in order to rally his people. Mark then gives an account of how and why John had been executed by Herod Antipas.

When the apostles returned from their mission, Jesus took them to an isolated place for rest although the crowds found out about it and got there ahead of them. Having compassion on the people, Jesus taught them. It was an isolated location and the hour was late. There was no food to be had, other than five loaves and two small fish. Jesus performed yet another miracle by feeding five thousand men plus any women and children that were with them from such a small stock. Amazingly, there were twelve basketfuls left over!

Jesus then sent his disciples ahead of him across the lake to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd and went up on a mountain to pray. The sea was stormy and the disciples found it hard going. Very early in the morning Jesus went out to them, walking on the water, which at first terrified his disciples.

He then got into the boat with them, calmed the storm, and they completed their crossing.

They did not arrive at Bethsaida as planned. Instead, they landed at Gennesaret, where Jesus drew large crowds from across the whole region, many of whom brought their sick to him to be healed. They were even healed simply by touching his cloak!

II.b.iv Mark 6:1-6a - A Prophet Without Honour

The account closes this section on the theme of the rejection of Jesus in Nazareth, where Jesus was not accepted in his own hometown.

¹ Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. ² When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.

“Where did this man get these things?” they asked. “What’s this wisdom that has been given him? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?”

Mark 6:1-2

Jesus had relocated to the larger town of Capernaum, where he had most recently healed a sick woman and raised a young child back to life. Then he went back to his hometown of Nazareth, where he had spent his childhood. It is possible that Mary’s husband Joseph was dead by this time and that Jesus was designated the head of the family, a role he could not fulfil because of his ministry calling. This may have been the cause of tensions with his supposed biological family as previously noted: <<*When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, “He is out of his mind”*>> (Mark 3:21). As was so often the case, Jesus began to teach on the Sabbath.

In cities other than Jerusalem, the synagogue was the centre of Jewish worship during the time of Christ. Synagogues were located in most of the leading towns of Israel; although very little remains of the original 1st Century synagogue in Nazareth that would have been so familiar to Jesus.

The synagogues typically consisted of large rooms, including some basilicas built with the intent of serving as synagogues, with bench seating along the wall. Often the Torah ark, which was the storage place of the OT scrolls, would be found within the synagogue and there is evidence for some synagogues, e.g. Chorazin, of a special decorative seat called the Seat of Moses. Moses’ seat is traditionally understood as referring symbolically to the authority of Moses. However, recent archaeological evidence has revealed a literal chair found in early synagogues. Whether literal or figurative, it refers to a place from which experts on the law taught.

Literary evidence indicates that Sabbath services at a synagogue involved singing, set prayer readings and the reading of Scripture. In Palestine, this probably involved regular annual Sabbath reading cycles in Hebrew, with Aramaic translations or interpretation, as confirmed in Mishnah, *Megillah* 4.1-5

and 4:10. There would also have been an interpretative homily on the weekly Scripture reading and a priestly blessing.

Many who heard him were amazed. The teaching of Jesus was amazing. Even though he would have been given the appropriate Scripture to read on the Sabbath, it was on an occasion like this in Nazareth, perhaps this very occasion, that, to the amazement of everyone, Jesus announced he was the Messiah: <<*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."* Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him>> (Luke 4:16-20).

Where did this man get these things? This verse testifies to the genuine humanity of Jesus. Until he began his ministry, his deity was so well hidden that even people in his hometown, who had known him well since childhood, had no idea that he is also fully God.

What's this wisdom that has been given him? They had known Jesus all his life and would have known that he had not been educated in a rabbinic school, the only type of education to their knowledge that would bring such wisdom. King Solomon was reputed to have been the wisest man to have lived: <<*Solomon's wisdom was greater than the wisdom of all the people of the East, and greater than all the wisdom of Egypt>> (1 Kings 4:30). However, that had now been superseded: <<*The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here>> (Luke 11:31).**

³ Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him.

Mark 6:3

Isn't this the carpenter? Mary's husband Joseph was a carpenter and it was traditional for the sons to learn their father's trade. Paul was a Pharisee and a scholar, yet he too had a trade: <<*There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them>> (Acts 18:2-3).*

The questions of v.2 are followed by sceptical, slightly derogatory questions: Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son? The latter comment may hint that Jesus was rumoured to be an illegitimate child and perhaps supports the theory that Joseph had died. Mary's husband Joseph must have had at least four sons, among whom were James and Judas, but not the betrayer. James later became a senior

figure in the Jerusalem church. Both he and Jude became NT authors; he also had at least two daughters. On Jesus' brothers and sisters, see comments made on Mark 3:31-35, and the document located in the About section of the website.

Because of the tensions between Jesus' obvious wisdom and power to: <<***perform these remarkable miracles***>> in v.2, and his simple origins, the people **took offence at him**. If this was the same occasion as recorded in Luke, the people then turned violent toward Jesus: <<***They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff***>> (Luke 4:29). If this was a subsequent visit, it would demonstrate the remarkable courage that Jesus always showed in the face of such hostility toward him.

⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home."

Mark 6:4

Like other **prophets** before him, **Jesus is not honoured** by his own family and his hometown: <<***But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy***>> (2 Chronicles 36:16), and: <<***Therefore this is what the Lord says about the people of Anathoth who are threatening to kill you, saying, "Do not prophesy in the name of the Lord or you will die by our hands"***>> (Jeremiah 11:21). This rejection foreshadowed Jesus' ultimate rejection in Jerusalem. Jesus indirectly acknowledged that he saw himself at least as a **prophet** of God.

⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. ^{6a} He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Mark 6:5-6a

With some exceptions, Jesus **could not do any miracles there**. Jesus does not force his miracles on a hostile, sceptical audience. It stands in contradiction to the character and will of Jesus to heal where there is fundamental rejection of him, i.e. unbelief; for hard-heartedness and rejection of Jesus prevent the Spirit's healing ministry, just as they prevent forgiveness of sin.

Except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. This account almost seems to read that healing the sick had become so routine as to almost not qualify as a miracle anymore! This also provides a good lesson for all disciples to always try to do what is right even in the face of hostility and derision.

Nevertheless, Jesus continued teaching despite being **amazed at their lack of faith**. His amazement does not mean it caught him by surprise although it must have left him wondering just what God would have to do to convince some people for the need to turn back to him. Jesus was also amazed at the faith of a Gentile Centurion: <<***When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, "Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith"***>> (Matthew 8:10). Amazement was something that was seen so frequently in others: <<***Look at the nations and watch – and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not***>>

believe, even if you were told>> (Habakkuk 1:5), and: *<<The people were amazed when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled made well, the lame walking and the blind seeing. And they praised the God of Israel>>* (Matthew 15:31). Even his closest followers never ceased to be amazed by the powers of Jesus: *<<When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. “How did the fig tree wither so quickly?” they asked>>* (Matthew 21:20).

II.c Mark 6:6b-8:26 - Work beyond Galilee

The systematically trained disciples were sent out to spread the message of God’s Kingdom, to heal and to cast out demons. Jesus again demonstrated his authority and warned his disciples against hard heartedness.

II.c.i Mark 6:6b-13 - Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

What was anticipated in Mark 3:14-15 now happened. The Twelve were by now trained emissaries of Jesus’ message. Like Jesus, they were to proclaim repentance (vv.10-12), cast out unclean spirits (v.7), and heal the sick (v.13). The message of the Kingdom of God was thus spread even further.

^{6b} Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. ⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

Mark 6:6b-7

Calling the Twelve refers to those designated apostles as discussed in Mark 3:13-19. To send them out two by two was to give them further experience of their future mission while Jesus was still around to support them, give them feedback and further training by explaining what had happened to them. Going out in pairs would be for both fellowship and for security. It was also a requirement for witness testimony under the law, although that was more to do with testimonies at criminal trials. King Solomon wrote: *<<Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour>>* (Ecclesiastes 4:9), and: *<<Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?>>* (Ecclesiastes 4:11).

Gave them authority over impure spirits. Simply being a disciple of Christ does not give a person such authority; that was given explicitly. However, all disciples have the authority to pray either to be given such a gift or to call on the Holy Spirit to intercede directly in such a situation.

⁸ These were his instructions: “Take nothing for the journey except a staff — no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. ⁹ Wear sandals but not an extra shirt.

Mark 6:8-9

The travel instructions are unique and specific for the disciples, in contrast to the more general teaching: *<<Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.*

What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels">>
(Mark 8:34-38).

These unique instructions served as signs to the Jewish people of peace, defencelessness, trust in God and urgency. The scene echoes the first exodus: ***<<This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover>>*** (Exodus 12:11).

In both instances there is liberation from servitude. Bread, bag, money in your belts and an extra shirt or tunic, all represented the kinds of things which secure life; the provisions were to come from people who would repent upon hearing the disciples' message. It is also a lesson to trust in God as he ultimately provides all their needs.

Take nothing for the journey except a staff but to wear sandals. Various explanations have been proposed to reconcile these words with: ***<<Do not get any gold or silver or copper to take with you in your belts – no bag for the journey or extra shirt or sandals or a staff, for the worker is worth his keep>>*** (Matthew 10:9-10), and: ***<<He told them: "Take nothing for the journey – no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt">>*** (Luke 9:3). The best solution is probably that in Matthew and Luke, Jesus told the disciples not to acquire a new staff or sandals for their journey, but in Mark he adds that they can take the sandals and staff they already have. Some interpreters have proposed that the disciples were permitted to take a walking staff, while the staff prohibited in Matthew 10:10 and Luke 9:3 was for self-defence.

Jesus was not prohibiting the Twelve from owning any of these items; rather, he was stressing the specific requirements of this particular mission. This was to be a relatively quick preaching journey, so they were not to spend time procuring extra supplies; those to whom they minister must support their mission.

¹⁰ Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town.

Mark 6:10

Whenever you enter a house. It was expected that hospitality would be offered to them wherever they went. This was an ancient custom that was still expected in Jesus' day, although it might be that these would be disciples that were providing the accommodation and food. There are examples of such hospitality from early times in the OT: ***<<The two angels arrived at Sodom in the evening, and Lot was sitting in the gateway of the city. When he saw them, he got up to meet them and bowed down with his face to the ground. "My lords," he said, "please turn aside to your servant's house. You can wash your feet and spend the night and then go on your way early in the morning." "No," they answered, "we will spend the night in the square." But he insisted so strongly that they did go with him and entered his house. He prepared a meal for them, baking bread without yeast, and they ate>>*** (Genesis 19:1-3), and

continued in the NT church era, as with Lydia in Philippi: <<When she and the members of her household were baptised, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.” And she persuaded us>> (Acts 16:15), and Paul’s group returning to Jerusalem: <<We continued our voyage from Tyre and landed at Ptolemais, where we greeted the brothers and sisters and stayed with them for a day. Leaving the next day, we reached Cæsarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven>> (Acts 21:7-8).

Stay there. There are several reasons for this:

1. Disciples were not to go from house to house looking perhaps for better accommodation or hospitality, for they were to accept whatever they received in the first place that accepted them.
2. By staying in one location it would have made it easier for people to come to them in order to hear what they had to say or to have them perform healing miracles on their sick.
3. It sent out a strong message to their opponents that they were there for the duration and would not be forced to relocate to get away from any persecution or mistreatment.

¹¹ And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.”

Mark 6:11

Later rabbinic sources note that Jews who returned from Gentile regions were to shake the dust off that was on their feet as a form of cleansing. Here it also served as a sign of judgement against the local inhabitants who did not welcome the apostles or even listen to their life changing message. There is no human militancy in the proclamation of Jesus’ message. God is the sole judge. The act of shaking the dust off was an illustration of the fact that their rejection of God’s message left their town accountable to God.

¹² They went out and preached that people should repent.

Mark 6:12

Preached that people should repent provided a correlation with the start of this whole account: <<And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins>> (Mark 1:4).

¹³ They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

Mark 6:13

They drove out many demons because they had the authority of Jesus to do so.

Oil was commonly used in prayer for healing sick people. Some think that anointing with oil was medicinal or sacramental, as in Roman Catholic extreme unction at death, although it is best seen as a symbol representing the healing power of the Holy Spirit coming upon the sick person. It is based on Scripture for it

was performed in the OT when ordaining people to serve God: <<*After you put these clothes on your brother Aaron and his sons, anoint and ordain them. Consecrate them so they may serve me as priests*>> (Exodus 28:41), and: <<*So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah*>> (1 Samuel 16:13), and in the NT era: <<*While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off*>> (Acts 13:2-3). It was a sign of Jesus’ sonship: <<*You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy*>> (Hebrews 1:9). It was also used in association with the healing of the sick: <<*Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord*>> (James 5:14).

II.c.ii Mark 6:14-29 - John the Baptist Beheaded

The death of John the Baptist cast an ominous shadow on Jesus’ future. Jesus’ life was in danger, partly on account of his authoritative, miraculous deeds and partly on account that his message threatened the privileged lifestyle of both the political and religious leaders at that time.

^{14a} King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known.

Mark 6:14a

King Herod Antipas, the seventh son of Herod the Great, was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (4BC-AD39), serving as an administrator under Roman authority. He was only 17 years old when his father died. The kingdom was then divided among three of Herod’s sons – Archelaus, Antipas and Philip II. Antipas was not technically a king, although his contemporaries may have referred to him as such, hence his statement in v.23: <<*half of my kingdom*>>. He lost his position in AD39 after trying to gain complete sovereignty.

The Herod dynasty came originally from Idumæa, a land to the south that had once been part of Judah. Herod the Great became a proselyte, i.e. a Gentile who became a full associate of the Jewish faith. He was renowned as a great builder, both in Palestine and in other parts of the Roman Empire, including Athens. He built the magnificent Jerusalem Temple that is referred to in the Gospel accounts. His sons were brought up in the Jewish faith, although they had a reputation for brutality. Antipas was responsible for the martyrdom of James, son of Zebedee (Acts 12:2), but would himself die in agony for accepting personal glory for his own perceived divinity: <<*Immediately, because Herod did not give praise to God, an angel of the Lord struck him down, and he was eaten by worms and died*>> (Acts 12:23).

Jesus’ name had become well known. Jesus taught and performed his miracles openly and publically, therefore it was always likely that news about him would spread, despite his repeated calls for people not to tell others about him, such as the leper: <<*“See that you don’t tell this to anyone. But go, show yourself to*

the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them”>> (Mark 1:44), and the people of the Decapolis: <<Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone. But the more he did so, the more they kept talking about it>> (Mark 7:36). It was also known by the Gentiles: <<You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout the province of Judæa, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached – how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him>> (Acts 10:36-38).

^{14b} Some were saying, “John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.”

¹⁵ Others said, “He is Elijah.”

And still others claimed, “He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.”

Mark 6:14b-15

The list of popular beliefs about Jesus, which is repeated by the apostles in Mark 8:27-28, includes that he was:

1. The revived John the Baptist given new miraculous powers as a result.
2. The long awaited and expected Elijah: <<“*See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction*”>> (Malachi 4:5-6).
3. Like one of the prophets of long ago; that is, with the same power and authority as they had to speak the words of God, although not actually one of them sent back by God.

The first belief, held by Herod Antipas: <<*John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!*>> (v.16), was clearly false. Had he been correct though it would have been something for him to fear, for John the Baptist might have been seeking retribution. Jesus would have told him whom to fear: <<*But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after your body has been killed, has authority to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him*>> (Luke 12:5).

The second opinion reflected the widespread expectation in Judaism that Elijah, who was caught up to heaven without dying: <<*As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind*>> (2 Kings 2:11), would return at the end of time: <<*“I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the Lord Almighty. But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap*>> (Malachi 3:1-2). Contrary to popular speculation that Jesus

might be the expected Elijah, Jesus himself described John the Baptist as that one: <<And they asked him, “Why do the teachers of the law say that Elijah must come first?” Jesus replied, “To be sure, Elijah does come first, and restores all things. Why then is it written that the Son of Man must suffer much and be rejected? But I tell you, Elijah has come, and they have done to him everything they wished, just as it is written about him”>> (Mark 9:11-13).

The third proposal: a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago, might have arisen from Deuteronomy 18:15 <<The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him>>, and again: <<I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their fellow Israelites, and I will put my words in his mouth. He will tell them everything I command him>> (Deuteronomy 18:18). Jesus was far greater than any of these theories, something that Peter’s confession at Cæsarea Philippi will show: <<Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Cæsarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, “Who do people say I am?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him>> (Mark 8:27-30).

It seems strange that Herod, along with many other people, were prepared to accept it was John the Baptist that had been raised from the dead, yet later they would not believe that Jesus had been raised back to life! Jesus had told a parable that this would be the case: <<“Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ““No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ “He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead’”>> (Luke 16:29-31). There will come a day though when the whole world will be struck with fear and awe at the two witnesses being raised to life: <<The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them>> (Revelation 11:10-11).

¹⁶ But when Herod heard this, he said, “John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!”

Mark 6:16

John, whom I beheaded. Mark does not tell the story of John’s death chronologically but introduces it here thematically, to give further explanation to his narrative. Herod did not personally kill John but gave orders for him to be executed, making him responsible and accountable for it.

¹⁷ For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested, and he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, whom he had married.

Mark 6:17

John the Baptist had publicly charged Herod Antipas with breaking the Mosaic Law by marrying Herodias in AD27: <<*Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonour your brother*>> (Leviticus 18:16), and: <<*If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonoured his brother. They will be childless*>> (Leviticus 20:21). Herodias was the former wife of Herod's still living half brother Herod Philip I, the son of Mariamne II and Herod the Great. As a result, Herod Antipas had John arrested and put in prison, which heralded the formal start of Jesus' ministry: <<*After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!"*>> (Mark 1:14-15). Note that Philip I, also known as Herod II, should not be confused with the other son of Herod the Great: Philip II, tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, as recorded in Luke 3:1.

¹⁸ For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife."

Mark 6:18

John had been saying. John was not the type of man to keep quiet whenever he encountered problems or misdeeds, but spoke out truthfully: <<*John said to the crowds coming out to be baptised by him, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire"*>> (Luke 3:7-9). His outspoken nature eventually led to his arrest: <<*But when John rebuked Herod the tetrarch because of his marriage to Herodias, his brother's wife, and all the other evil things he had done, Herod added this to them all: He locked John up in prison*>> (Luke 3:19-20).

It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife. Herod Antipas was not a Jew by birth but by adoption of the faith, yet John did not hesitate to tell him that he had violated the moral law of God as recently noted from Leviticus 18:16. Similarly, the Gospel message that people should repent (v.12), which would eventually go to all the Gentiles as well as Jews, assumes that God holds all people in the world accountable to his moral laws as revealed in Scripture.

¹⁹ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, ²⁰ because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.

Mark 6:19-20

Herodias thus nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. However, Herod Antipas feared John and resisted her plans by protecting him. It is likely that Antipas feared an uprising by the people on account of John's popularity: <<*The whole Judæan countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to*

him. Confessing their sins, they were baptised by him in the Jordan River>> (Mark 1:5), and also held a superstitious fear of some kind of divine punishment. The Jewish historian Josephus noted that people viewed Antipas' death as God's judgment for slaying John the Baptist (Jewish Antiquities 18.116-118). Antipas also saw John's innocence and godliness, and thus had conflicting thoughts about him: he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him. No doubt puzzled at John continued call for Herod to repent of his sins and turn to God, for he was not fully a Jew and did not think the Scriptures applied to him.

He liked to listen to him. John spoke plainly to Herod on many things that he would not normally have wanted to hear. However, there was clearly something in what he said that stirred in Herod's heart. Perhaps he admired his candour as indicated by Solomon: <<*Whoever rebukes a person will in the end gain favour rather than one who has a flattering tongue*>> (Proverbs 28:23). In a similar situation, the Roman governor Felix liked to listen to his prisoner Paul, although when he realised that Paul's words about divine judgement might actually fall on him, Felix would dismiss Paul again: <<*Several days later Felix came with his wife Drusilla, who was Jewish. He sent for Paul and listened to him as he spoke about faith in Christ Jesus. As Paul talked about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, "That's enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you"*>> (Acts 24:24-25).

These accounts teach us how important it is to do what is right in the sight of God rather than to seek the approval of men. Some have even given up their chance of eternal salvation for short term approval: <<Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not openly acknowledge their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved human praise more than praise from God>> (John 12:42-43).

²¹ Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee.

Mark 6:21

Finally the opportune time came. It appears that Herodias had waited a long time for this opportunity to avenge her hurt pride at John's expense. It is not clear whether getting her young daughter Salome to dance for the king was her idea or whether it was just the way it happened. There is at least one commentator that holds a conspiracy theory that Herod wanted rid of John but did not want to take the blame and so the whole episode was planned by him to have John killed in a way that would publically absolve himself in front of some significant people drawn from the community.

The leaders of three societal groups were invited to celebrate the birthday of Herod Antipas: nobles, or high-ranking governmental leaders of Galilee; military officers, probably Romans, for there was no Jewish army; and leading men, wealthy and prominent Galilæans.

²² When the daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests.

The king said to the girl, “Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.”

Mark 6:22

The daughter of Herodias came in and danced, she pleased Herod and his dinner guests. It was common in that era and culture to have young women dance as entertainment. On occasions, such dances would have been quite sexually explicit and common among the Romans. Some commentators believe this was the case and the reason why they were so greatly pleased with her. However, this would not have been the case if any of the guests were Jews, who would not, publically at least, have tolerated or welcomed such behaviour.

Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you. This was an extravagant and foolish offer to be made so publically. Herod would soon qualify it, although it would still remain an offer far greater in value than the foregoing entertainment would have warranted.

²³ And he promised her with an oath, “Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom.”

Mark 6:23

Herod Antipas not only offered to fulfil the wish of Herodias’ daughter Salome but reinforced his statement by means of a public oath, see v.26. According to Josephus, the birthday party was held in his palace at Machærus, with Herodias’ daughter being called Salome, aged 12-14 years old (Jewish Antiquities 18.136).

Up to half of my kingdom is to be understood more as a figure of speech than a literal promise, although it was a rash one just the same.

²⁴ She went out and said to her mother, “What shall I ask for?”

“The head of John the Baptist,” she answered.

²⁵ At once the girl hurried in to the king with the request: “I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.”

Mark 6:24-25

What shall I ask for? The girl may genuinely have not known what she should request or she may have been submitting to her mother’s authority due to her own young age. The offer of half the kingdom did not interest Herodias, her mother, she immediately knew what she wanted: the head of John the Baptist.

At once the girl hurried in to the king. The offer may have been made when Herod had been drinking or at least carried away with the occasion. No doubt Herodias wanted to make sure the request of the gift was made as publically known as the oath was, so that the king could not then withdraw from the offer without the loss of face before his eminent guests and subjects.

²⁶ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her.

Mark 6:26

Mark only refers to Herod as the king, whereas Matthew refers to him both as Herod the tetrarch and the king. Luke only ever refers to him as the tetrarch, his correct title, showing Luke's greater emphasis on historical fact, rather than Mark's focus on telling the accounts of what happened in the life of Jesus from the accepted perspective of those days. Since Herod would have seen himself as a king, both Mark's and Matthew's accounts are in no way to be seen as flawed because of their use of such a grand title.

Was greatly distressed. Herod Antipas was grieved because he did not relish putting John to death. However, Herodias had manoeuvred Antipas into a public oath in the presence of his dinner guests, which included some of his most important and influential subjects. His reputation and authority were at stake, therefore he did not want to refuse her; in fact, he could not!

²⁷ So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, ²⁸ and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.

Mark 6:27-28

He immediately sent an executioner. Technically, a death sentence could only be carried out with the authority of the Roman Governor. It appears that Herod had sufficient authority to carry out such a punishment on his own subjects. Death without a trial was not only contrary to Jewish Law, it went against God's moral law once again.

His head on a platter. This may seem a bit gruesome to a 21st Century audience. It was quite common in many cultures even into modern times to display the heads of defeated enemies to prove to others that they were dead.

²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

Mark 6:29

John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. These men showed great courage in doing so for they identified themselves with a man that had made many powerful enemies, yet they felt it their duty to give their former master a suitable burial. This was similar to the actions of men after King Saul, his son the beloved Jonathan, and other sons of Saul, were killed in battle: <<*When all the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men went and took the bodies of Saul and his sons and brought them to Jabesh. Then they buried their bones under the great tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days*>> (1 Chronicles 10:11-12).

II.c.iii Mark 6:30-44 - Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

This is one of the best known miracles performed by Jesus and is one of the few events to appear in detail in all four Gospel accounts. However, it was never intended to be just about feeding people or indeed to show how many could be so miraculously fed from such a small amount of food through its supernatural multiplication. Here was a lesson both for the disciples and for the crowd to show the power of God and to indicate that Jesus was their real food for life; their daily bread: <<*I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread*>> (Job 23:12), <<*Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread*>> (Proverbs 30:8), and: <<*Give us each day our daily bread*>> (Luke 11:3). This would indicate the total reliance that people should and could put on God for all their needs.

³⁰ The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.

Mark 6:30

Mark refers back to Jesus' sending of the apostles in vv.7-13. The apostles and disciples learned Jesus' message by listening to his teaching, by proclaiming what he proclaimed, and by reporting upon their return all that they had done and taught.

Reported to him. Although there is no formal requirement for a disciple to make themselves accountable to a church leader, it is the right thing to do when that leader is Christ but also a good thing to do with other church leaders for the following reasons: <<*Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you*>> (Hebrews 13:17).

³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."

Mark 6:31

So many people were coming and going. Jesus needed time to teach his apostles and disciples, but the crowds were incessant, giving him very little time, not even for a meal, i.e. they did not even have a chance to eat. This was not the only time this had happened: <<*Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat*>> (Mark 3:20).

To a quiet place and get some rest. Jesus knew the importance of taking time out and it is something that people in the church today need to take heed of to avoid any type of burn out.

³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognised them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Mark 6:32-33

Went to a solitary place, but many, got there ahead of them. Once again there is an indication of just how fast the news spread, for Jesus was being closely watched by the people all the time. Such was their desire to be near him, to be healed, to witness the miracles and to be captivated by his teaching that they ran on foot to get there.

Matthew also states they went to a solitary place and John that they went across to the far shore of the lake, but Luke writes that it was at Bethsaida that the multitude were fed: <<When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing>> (Luke 9:10-11). It is likely that Bethsaida was their intended next destination but that they had stopped at a more deserted location for a chance to rest and eat; it was here that the crowd found Jesus. This is confirmed by a different translation: <<And the apostles, when they had returned, told Him all that they had done. And He took them and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida>> (Luke 9:10 21CKJV), which makes more sense with the rest of the account given in all four Gospels.

³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.

Mark 6:34

Saw a large crowd, he had compassion. Jesus had hoped for solitude, although he always makes it his business to welcome those who come to him. That should be the aim of all disciples throughout the ages. People need to be the first concern of the church, for they either are the church, or they may be about to become part of it, or they may simply be people who need to be served by it.

Despite his need for rest, Jesus had compassion; he sees the people as being like sheep without a shepherd: <<“May the Lord, the God who gives breath to all living things, appoint someone over this community to go out and come in before them, one who will lead them out and bring them in, so the Lord’s people will not be like sheep without a shepherd”>> (Numbers 27:16-17), because: <<You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals>> (Ezekiel 34:4-5).

The prophet also wrote: <<This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against the shepherds and will hold them accountable for my flock. I will remove them from tending the flock so that the shepherds can no longer feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths, and it will no longer be food for them. “For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is

with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness. I will bring them out from the nations and gather them from the countries, and I will bring them into their own land. I will pasture them on the mountains of Israel, in the ravines and in all the settlements in the land. I will tend them in a good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel will be their grazing land. There they will lie down in good grazing land, and there they will feed in a rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I myself will tend my sheep and have them lie down, declares the Sovereign Lord. I will search for the lost and bring back the strays. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak, but the sleek and the strong I will destroy. I will shepherd the flock with justice>> (Ezekiel 34:10-16), where God promises to shepherd the people again directly, since Israel's leaders have failed.

Here, Jesus began teaching them many things, functioning as the good shepherd: <<*Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked faithfully, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly on the earth">> (Genesis 48:15), <<The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me>> (Psalm 23:1-4 ESV), <<He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young>> (Isaiah 40:11), and: <<I will place shepherds over them who will tend them, and they will no longer be afraid or terrified, nor will any be missing," declares the Lord>> (Jeremiah 23:4), who calls for repentant submission to the messianic rule of God: <<I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me>> (John 10:14).*

Jesus knew that feeding his sheep spiritually was more important than the miracle to come where he would feed them physically. Spiritual feeding through the Word was something he later explicitly instructed Peter to do: <<*The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep">> (John 21:17), which implicitly applies to all subsequent church leaders and bible teachers.*

³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

³⁷ But he answered, "You give them something to eat."

They said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

Mark 6:35-37

The disciples' plausible suggestion: send the people away so that they can, buy themselves something to eat is met with Jesus' thought-provoking response: you give them something to eat. The disciples in turn respond with surprise, perhaps tinged with mild sarcasm, that the cost of providing food for such a large crowd would be beyond their means.

More than half a year's wages In another account of this event the cost of the food is indicated: <<*Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little"*>> (John 6:7 NASB), where two hundred denarii represented 200 days' wages for a labourer.

³⁸ "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five – and two fish."

Mark 6:38

How many loaves do you have? Jesus clearly intended that the disciples do what he says and to trust him for the outcome. They had only just returned from a mission where they had healed the sick and driven out impure spirits. This was something that was still beyond their comprehension.

Five – and two fish. Some commentators believe this was the provisions they had in their boat, although that seems to be a meagre amount for there were at least thirteen men including Jesus, whose group had probably intended being in Bethsaida by the time they needed to eat. However, it should not be forgotten that John records that the food belonged to a small boy: <<*Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?"*>> (John 6:8-9).

³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.

Mark 6:39-40

Directed them to have all the people to sit down again brings the words of King David to mind: <<*He makes me lie down in green pastures*>> (Psalm 23:2a).

In groups of hundreds and fifties. Breaking a crowd down into groups made it easier to administer the serving of the food, although that would still be a miracle in itself. Moses had formed a leadership structure in order to manage the people in similar sized groups: <<*He chose capable men from all Israel and made them leaders of the people, officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens*>> (Exodus 18:25).

⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied,

Mark 6:41-42

Looking up to heaven. Jesus depended on his heavenly Father in this miracle of multiplying food, although his actions would also help to instill that image to others around, reminding them that all good things come from God the Father, as well as the power for life, as seen in the raising of Lazarus: *<<So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go">>* (John 11:41-44).

He gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. Jesus' divine powers could have placed the food in front of the people. However, Jesus teaches another lesson on servanthood to his disciples, showing that he has always intended to serve people through those in his church. It would also appear that the miracle occurred through the hands of the apostles rather than through Jesus, whose Spirit was no doubt at work within those that served him, even though it had not yet been fully poured out upon them.

They all ate and were satisfied. As the true shepherd, Jesus satisfied them. They had only a meagre fare but were satisfied just the same, which is a different story to the Israelites in the desert whom God supplied with manna and quail, yet: *<<They wilfully put God to the test by demanding the food they craved>>* (Psalm 78:18). As God provided manna in the desert: *<<He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord>>* (Deuteronomy 8:3), so Jesus provided food in a deserted place (v.35). The focus is thus not on the miracle itself but on the one who worked it. Jesus is not merely a prophet; he acts as God acts. The feeding of the 5,000 reinforces Jesus' proclamation: after feeding them the Word of God (v.34), they now miraculously receive bread and fish, their basic foods; something Jesus himself would eat after his resurrection from the dead: *<<They gave him a piece of a broiled fish>>* (Luke 24:42), and on the beach: *<<When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread>>* (John 21:9).

⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish.

Mark 6:43

The disciples picked up twelve basketfuls. It was seen elsewhere that much food is left over, such as with the miracles of Elijah: *<<For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah>>* (1 Kings 17:16), and Elisha: *<<Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a*

jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left”>> (2 Kings 4:4-7), and: <<A man came from Baal Shalishah, bringing the man of God twenty loaves of barley bread baked from the first ripe grain, along with some heads of new grain. “Give it to the people to eat,” Elisha said. “How can I set this before a hundred men?” his servant asked. But Elisha answered, “Give it to the people to eat. For this is what the Lord says: ‘They will eat and have some left over.’” Then he set it before them, and they ate and had some left over, according to the word of the Lord>> (2 Kings 4:42-44). Here, Jesus did not want any food to be wasted. He always provided an abundance of food at that time: <<When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink>> (Luke 5:6-7), and: <<He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish>> (John 21:6). There will certainly be sufficient for everyone in his eternal Kingdom.

The fact there was twelve basketfuls of broken pieces left over was probably quite deliberate so that each one of the apostles who participated in serving the multitude could collect one! Those who serve God get to enjoy the fruit of the abundant supply that Jesus gives. Also, twelve symbolises the sons of Jacob and therefore the people of Israel themselves.

⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

Mark 6:44

Five thousand men. There were almost certainly women and children in the crowd, perhaps doubling or even trebling the total number of people fed. However, with God it is not a numbers game, for to him each individual is precious and loved.

II.c.iv Mark 6:45-56 - Jesus Walks on the Water

After feeding the crowd, Jesus wanted some time on his own and sent the disciples on ahead, so they set sail across the Sea of Galilee. When it was time for Jesus to rejoin them, he set off, walking across the surface of the sea! After he had rejoined them, they continued to Gennesaret, where he healed many sick people.

⁴⁵ Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd.

Mark 6:45

Jesus sent his disciples ahead to Bethsaida in order to retreat for personal prayer (v.46). He took on the responsibility of dismissing the crowd himself, although they had started to have some idea who Jesus was and had other intentions: <<After the people saw the sign Jesus performed, they began to say, “Surely this is the Prophet who is to come into the world.” Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself>> (John 6:14-15). Jesus therefore spent some time alone with his Father.

⁴⁶ After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

Mark 6:46

As noted from the text from John's Gospel, Jesus left the crowd to be alone with his Father. Of course, no one could be less alone than when they spend time alone with their heavenly Father.

⁴⁷ Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸ He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them,

Mark 6:47-48

As noted during the occasion of the previous stormy crossing (Mark 4:35-41), the Sea of Galilee is 696 feet or 212m below sea level, resulting in violent downdrafts and sudden windstorms. See the image.



The Sea of Galilee at Dawn

Shortly before dawn. Another translation states: <<And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind

was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them>> (v.48 ESV), where the 4th watch would have been between 03:00 and 06:00, confirming it would have been just before sunrise.

Jesus saw that the disciples were straining at the oars because the wind was against them, therefore in need of his help. So he went out to them, walking on the lake, something only God could do: <<He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea>> (Job 9:8), although he can also part the waters to get through: <<This is what the Lord says – he who made a way through the sea, a path through the mighty waters>> (Isaiah 43:16).

He was about to pass by them, not so that they would fail to see him, in which case he would have stayed further away from them. His intention was that they would see him pass by, the Greek *parerchomai*, walking on the lake, thus giving visible evidence of his deity, as well as answering the question they had asked after he stilled the sea: <<They were terrified and asked each other, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!”>> (Mark 4:41). The passage echoes the incident where God passed before Moses, where the same verb, *parerchomai*, occurs in the Septuagint: <<And the Lord said, “I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion>> (Exodus 33:19), <<When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by>> (Exodus 33:22), and again: <<And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining

love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation”>> (Exodus 34:6), giving a glimpse of his glory. There is an implicit claim to divinity in Jesus’ actions.

The wind was against them. The life of a disciple and indeed the church often seems to be one of sailing in a stormy sea, with a strong wind against or perhaps swimming against the tide. That is quite normal and to be expected for life is full of tests and trials. It is likely there will always be more opponents than friends, therefore the church may have to cry out: <<*The seas have lifted up, Lord, the seas have lifted up their voice; the seas have lifted up their pounding waves. Mightier than the thunder of the great waters, mightier than the breakers of the sea – the Lord on high is mighty*>> (Psalm 93:3-4). Yet Christ will always come, it may be in the fourth watch of the morning, shortly before dawn, but he is dependable and he will always come; then they can rejoice: <<*Deep calls to deep in the roar of your waterfalls; all your waves and breakers have swept over me. By day the Lord directs his love, at night his song is with me – a prayer to the God of my life*>> (Psalm 42:7-8).

⁴⁹ but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰ because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

Mark 6:49-50

The disciples were overwhelmed by what appeared to be a ghost. Ghost represents *phantasma*, a Greek term for spiritual appearances or apparitions. The disciples may have thought an evil spirit was trying to deceive them.

They all saw him and were terrified. This was a real event, not the imagination of an individual or a vision at night.

Take courage! Like God in the OT: <<*After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward”>> (Genesis 15:1), and his angels in the NT: <<*But the angel said to him: “Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John*>> (Luke 1:13), Jesus calmed their troubled hearts by identifying himself.*

It is I appears to echo: <<*God said to Moses, “I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I am has sent me to you’”>> (Exodus 3:14), and: <<*“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am!”>> (John 8:58). The Greek is *ego eimi*, which is better translated as ‘I am he’ or simply ‘I am’. Jesus would use these words again, which caused armed men to fall down before him: <<*Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, “Who is it you want?” “Jesus of Nazareth,” they replied. “I am he,” Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) When Jesus said, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground*>> (John 18:4-6).**

⁵¹ Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵² for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

Mark 6:51-52

The wind died down was the same effect that was seen on a previous crossing in Mark 4:35-41, although on this occasion Jesus did not even need to command it, he just climbed into the boat and it happened.

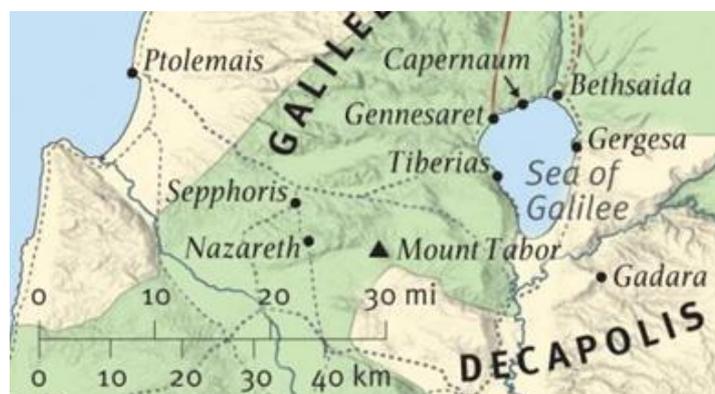
Their hearts were hardened. When Jesus calmed the storm earlier, the disciples had struggled with faith vs. fear (Mark 4:40); on this occasion they struggled with faith vs. fear plus hard-heartedness. Mark explains that multiplying the loaves should have demonstrated Jesus' true identity to them: <<*Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?*" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?">> (Mark 8:18-21), but neither that miracle nor the appearance of Jesus on the water could open their hearts to the reality of his divine nature. It always seems that men care more about saving their bodies than they do about saving their souls. Therefore, they seemed to miss so much of what was going on around them in the teaching, the miracles and most of all, in the character of Jesus as the Christ of God.

Accounts like this one, where it appears that Peter wanted Mark to deliberately show the apostles in a bad light, enhances the authenticity of the account. Most humans might be tempted to embellish the account, especially in terms of their own role in such a story. Peter clearly did not want to do that. In fact, he even omitted a remarkable part of the account where he too walked on the water: <<*"Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus*>> (Matthew 14:29).

⁵³ When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there.

Mark 6:53

The north easterly wind may have caused the boat to drift south-westward, bringing them to Gennesaret instead of their intended destination of Bethsaida (v.45). This would indicate they had fed the 5,000 somewhere between Gergesa and Bethsaida on the map. Gennesaret was either the town or the plain on



the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, southwest of Capernaum and was well known for its fertile soil and abundance of walnuts, figs and olives.

Bethsaida was just northeast of where the Jordan flows into the Sea of Galilee from the north. Research since the 1980s has focused on et-Tell as the site for Bethsaida. This site does have residential remains from around NT times, including a fisherman's house with ancient fishing equipment, built above an earlier Iron Age (OT-era) settlement. Excavation geologists suggest that the Sea of Galilee originally extended closer to this site than it does today.

⁵⁴ As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognised Jesus. ⁵⁵ They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

Mark 6:54-55

By this time Jesus was well known in Galilee. Whenever he entered that region, great multitudes gathered from around that whole region. Their first thought was to carry the sick to him for healing.

⁵⁶ And wherever he went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.

Mark 6:56

Jesus continued to pursue his core calling to preach in villages, towns and the countryside. He wanted to personally reach as many people as possible in his all too short time on earth, thus providing the apostles and disciples with a good harvest field when they would start to build the church.

The healing power of God was so strongly present that as many as touched even the edge of his cloak, were healed. Although it is the Holy Spirit that heals, not the garment or any other object.

It should be noted that the power to heal came from Jesus' Holy Spirit and not his clothing. Other examples of healing have been noted throughout history that have come from fabric or inanimate objects. These should not be thought of as sacred relics for they have no power in or of themselves. For example, when Peter was imprisoned by Herod, his chains fell away from his hands and feet by the power of the angel that freed him: <<Suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him up. "Quick, get up!" he said, and the chains fell off Peter's wrists>> (Acts 12:7). Tradition says that Peter's chains were kept by a soldier as a sacred relic and then presented to Eudoxia, a wealthy Samaritan women, who donated much of her wealth to the cause following her conversion. She was martyred in AD107. The early Roman Catholic Church dedicated a day in remembrance, not of Peter's miraculous escape, but for the alleged works of the chains. It is called Festum St. Petris Vinculorum and is held on 1 August, which seems a strange date as Peter was imprisoned during Passover, which always occurs in March or April! Such is the folly of men who focus on Religious tradition rather than faith in Christ. Another example of such healing is noted in association with Paul: <<God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them>> (Acts 19:11-12).