

Discipleship According to Mark

The Offense of Jesus (Mark 6:1-30)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on March 22, 2026

Introduction

- ❖ So far in our study of Mark's Gospel, Jesus has been depicted as an extremely popular figure, drawing tremendous crowds. They travel from afar to hear his preaching and to receive his ministry of healing from disease or demonic possession. **The crowds love him.** Now whether they recognize his true identity as the Son of God—whether they believe in him and follow him as disciples—that's a different matter. **But it's fair to say that he's beloved.** So far, the only ones questioning Jesus and his sanity have been his family members and the scribes and Pharisees. The general public loves him.
 - But that starts to change starting in Mark 6. Jesus is still able to draw a huge crowd. He's going to feed the five thousand in next week's passage. So he's still very popular. But at the start of chapter 6, when he returns to his hometown of Nazareth, the public's astonishment at Jesus takes on a different tone.
 - Then we get this interesting side story about John the Baptizer and King Herod. **It takes us out of the main plot narrative centered on Jesus.** It's a flashback scene. Revealing what happened to John. And why Herod would even think, according to v14, that Jesus was John the Baptizer raised from the dead. When and how did John die? This side story answers those questions.
- ❖ But it actually does far more than that. **You have to remember that, while modern readers like us are the intended audience for this Gospel, we're not the original audience.** That would be the early church and the early disciples living in the late-first century when Mark wrote this Gospel. **That original audience lived in different times under different circumstances.** While you could say that we, as Christians today, are living in challenging times under constant pressure and growing persecution—what we're going through just pales in comparison to the state-sponsored, deadly persecution that the early church had to endure during the days when Mark's Gospel was written.
 - So chapter 6 was written originally for the early church to prepare them for the opposition they were facing from state actors like governors and kings. And it serves as a needed reminder that any believer who takes seriously the call of discipleship—to proclaim the same message he preached—if we follow in his steps, we should expect nothing less. **The trials and tribulation that John the Baptizer experienced are par for the course for any follower of Jesus who is bold enough to go around proclaiming a message of repentance.**
- ❖ Notice how, in v12, Jesus sends out his disciples, two by two, to go from town to town in Galilee proclaiming "*that people should repent.*" **Now that's not a new message nor a new approach.** It's the same message Jesus started off preaching in Mark 1:15. It says he came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel, the good news of God, saying "*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.*"
 - So he sends out these disciples with the same message of repentance on their lips, and later, in chapter 6:30, they return to Jesus to report, "*all they had done and taught.*" And sandwiched between those two verses is this story about John the Baptizer and how he died for his audacity to preach to power, calling powerful people to repent.

- ❖ So here's the point of including that story right in the middle of this mission to proclaim a message of repentance: **If we, as the Church today, are going to embrace the same mission and proclaim the same message, then we can expect the same offense and opposition that Jesus and his disciples faced.**
 - So this morning, we're going to see people (1) offended by the ordinariness of Jesus and (2) maddened by the message of repentance. And those two reactions—along with that unique flashback scene in our passage—will serve as needed reminders for all followers of Jesus. We'll be (3) forewarned by the death of the Baptizer.

Offended by the Ordinariness of Jesus

- ❖ Let's begin by seeing how the people from Jesus's hometown are simply offended by his ordinariness. They've known him since he was a child. **They watched him grow up and go through the awkward stages of puberty and adolescence.**
 - That's Mary's boy. He used to be the town carpenter. But now he's this big shot, celebrity preacher that everyone's talking about? Really? Jesus? That guy?
- ❖ Look at v2. Jesus sticks with his established routine of entering the synagogue on a Sabbath and teaching from the OT Scriptures. And it says that many who heard him were *astonished*. It's the same Greek word used back in Mark 1:22 when the people of Capernaum were astonished as Jesus taught in their synagogue. They were amazed at his teaching and its authority. So unlike the scribes they were familiar with.
 - In his hometown, people are also astonished. **But the astonishment in Nazareth was not an expression of faith and wonder but of irritation and opposition.** Listen to the questions they raise in v2, "*Where did this man get these things? What is the wisdom given to him? How are such mighty works done by his hands?*"
- ❖ Notice how they're so busy trying to figure out how this man—that they knew so well growing up—how he could've obtained such wisdom and miracle-working power. **They're so busy trying to answer where he got these things that they never stopped to ask the far more important questions.** What does this mean? What if we don't know Jesus as well as we thought? Who then is this after all?
 - **They never get there in their line of questioning because they were too busy trying to poke holes in Jesus's growing reputation.** They try to prove that he's not all that special. Now they don't go as far as the Pharisees and accuse him of serving Beelzebub, but they just can't fathom the thought that God could be doing such mighty works through someone so ordinary and familiar to them.
- ❖ Listen to how incredulous they are in v3. "*Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James (who wrote the book of James) and Joses and Judas (who wrote the book of Jude) and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?*" *And they took offense at him.*"
 - They're thinking, "No, he can't be the Christ. Not this guy. We know this guy. That's the carpenter. Who used to work out of the wood shop on that corner. That's Mary's son. That's James's big brother. You remember him. How can someone we know so well be God's Anointed? **How can someone so ordinary like us be the Messiah?**"

- ❖ Not long ago, I attended a high school reunion, and I posted some pictures of me and my old friends on Facebook, and some of you commented, astonished that your pastor was friends with a Taiwanese celebrity, a popular television personality. And I still have a hard time grasping her popularity. To me, that's just my friend Janet that I've known since sixth grade. But apparently she's a big deal if you were living in Taiwan in the recent past. Now unlike the Nazarenes, I clearly have no animosity towards my friend and her fame. But I get it. I get how hard it is to wrap your head around the fact that someone so familiar to you—someone that seems so ordinary—is so well known and famous.
- ❖ **These Nazarenes grew up in a time and place where devout Jews were yearning for the Messiah.** For God's Anointed Savior to appear. For years, they languished under Roman rule and oppression, so messianic fervor was widespread and rampant. Some were expecting the Messiah to be a warrior, a military figure. Some were expecting a prophetic figure. Some were expecting the Son of God, a divine figure. **But standing before them was Jesus. A name, back then, just as common as John or Bill today.** He's just an ordinary guy like us.
- ❖ And they took offense at him. That's what it says at the end of v3. That verb *to take offense* comes from the Greek word *skandalon*, where we derive the English word *scandal*. **In other words, Jesus was now a scandal to them.** The thought of this man—whom they were all familiar with—that he could be God's Messiah was scandalous. It was an outrageous idea.
 - **The same Greek verb can also mean to cause someone to stumble or to fall away.** It's the same word to describe those who represent the rocky soil, who immediately hear Jesus out, but without any root, they just as quickly fall away (4:17). That's what's happening to the Nazarenes as they listen to Jesus teach. They're immediately astonished. **But just as quickly, Jesus becomes a stumbling block to them.**
- ❖ **Notice how the greatest obstacle to faith is not a failure on God's part to reveal himself. It's a refusal on man's part to accept a God who would appear so ordinary.** A mere carpenter. Mary's son. That local boy. **They were so familiar with Jesus's humanity that they couldn't fathom his deity.**
 - Jesus then quotes a popular saying. Look at v4, "*And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.'*" This is the first time in the Gospel that the term *prophet* is applied to Jesus. Which is significant. **Because like the prophets of old, this foreshadows the growing rejection that Jesus will continue to face.** And his eventual martyrdom, like many of the prophets who went before him, John the Baptizer included.
- ❖ So v5 goes on to say that Jesus "*could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them.*" Not because his power was limited by their unbelief. But, as he explained earlier, he came—not to heal those who stubbornly think they're well—but those who admit they're sick. **He came not to call the righteous, but sinners (2:17)**
 - And then look at v6, "*And he marveled because of their unbelief. And he went about among the villages teaching.*" In other Galilean towns, the crowd marvels at Jesus's wisdom and power. But here in his hometown, Jesus marvels at the crowd's unbelief.

- ❖ Friends, it's easy to look at Jesus's hometown family and friends and be astonished at how blind they were to his true identity. But let's be honest. **Let's acknowledge how easy it is for us to grow equally familiar with Jesus.** Many of us have grown up with Jesus all our lives. You grew up in a Christian home, in a Christian church. You can't recall a time in your life when you weren't familiar with Jesus.
 - **Just like those in his hometown of Nazareth, you've grown too familiar with him.** Jesus doesn't fill you with wonder. His love and grace doesn't amaze you. You've grown to expect it. If you're being honest, you're not all that impressed by him. He's not all that special. Just another guy you've known all your life.

- ❖ **Familiarity can certainly breed contempt. Or if not contempt, then at least a high degree of apathy.** If that describes you and the state of your relationship with Jesus, don't be surprised if you haven't seen him working in your life lately. You might be tempted to blame him for that. But instead, what if you took note from our text. **What if the problem is that your familiarity with Jesus has been devoid of desperate faith.** What if it's your hardened heart that needs to change.
 - There's still hope. All is not lost. He has not completely cut you off. Just note how, in spite of all the skepticism and contempt he received in his hometown, Jesus still *"laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them."* He was still merciful. He didn't completely cut them off or shut them out. He still performed mighty deeds in their midst. And the same could be true of you. Draw near, and he will draw near to you.

Maddened by the Message of Repentance

- ❖ So we've seen how the people of Nazareth were offended by Jesus's ordinariness. His appearance and demeanor was too plain—too far short of their expectations—and they took offense at him. **But if they took the time to actually hear him out and listen carefully to the message he brings, they'll be even more put off by his preaching.** We see this play out, starting in v7, when Jesus sends out his disciples in pairs to preach the gospel he's taught them. This leads to our second observation. We'll see people maddened by the message of repentance, particularly in this encounter between John the Baptizer and King Herod.
 - Follow with me starting in v7. He calls the Twelve—the disciples we were introduced to in chapter 3(:13-19). **He imparts to each of them a degree of his divine authority over demons and disease. And he entrusts them with his message of repentance.** And according to vv12-13, they rightly steward those gifts, *"¹²So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. ¹³And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them."*

- ❖ Now if you look back in v8, you'll notice that Jesus gave the Twelve a specific set of traveling instructions. **Telling them what to take along on their mission and what to leave behind.** And to accept the hospitality of the first household that opens up to you. Don't bother to go around looking for the family with the biggest house and best resources. **Just show up to minister to people in humility and in total dependence on God, trusting him to ultimately provide for you.**

- ❖ **This first mission they're sent on is meant to give them a taste of future ministry.** Ministry they'll engage in after Jesus has resurrected and ascended to the Father. It's also to introduce the Christian ministry principles of **simplicity** and **self-sacrifice** and **the reality of rejection**. Not everyone will welcome you with open arms. Not everyone will gladly listen.
 - If no one in that town receives you, if they close their ears to your message of repentance and refuse to listen, then "*when you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.*" That gesture of shaking the dust off your feet would've been familiar to ancient readers.

- ❖ **Ancient Jews would commonly shake the dust off their feet every time they returned back into the borders of Israel after traveling in Gentile territory.** That gesture was a well-recognized sign to communicate that the land you're leaving is a pagan place to be cut off from God's coming kingdom if they don't repent and come under his good rule. You don't want to bring their unrepentant dust into the holy land.
 - **So to shake the dust off your feet after leaving a town was really a sign of judgment against those people.** Which explains why Jesus prohibited them to bring some items and allowed others. Notice how the four items they're permitted to bring are the same four items the Israelites were told to pack as they fled Egypt (Ex 12:11). The one tunic on your back, one belt, a pair of sandals, and a staff. You are *not* to bring bread, money, or an extra tunic.

- ❖ The reasoning is twofold. **On one hand, it forces you to be dependent on the hospitality of others.** A willingness to receive you and to provide for your needs will be a sign of whether they receive your message of repentance or not. **But beyond forcing them to travel light, by only carrying those four items, the disciples are emulating the ancient Israelites who had to flee Egypt in haste because God's judgment was coming.**
 - So both their appearance and their preaching are to convey a message of judgment against those who refuse to repent. Judgment is coming if you don't turn away from your sin and place yourself under God's good rule. That's the message sent. But the big difference in Mark 6 is that the disciples aren't leaving Egypt or Gentile lands as they shake the dust. **They're leaving Jewish towns, warning of God's judgment to befall their fellow Jews who reject the Messiah and his message of repentance.**

- ❖ Judgment is beginning with the household of God. **God's own people need to repent.** That understandably is *not* a popular message. In fact, it maddens people. It enrages them when they're confronted with their cherished sins and told to repent—to turn away from them. This leads us to v14 and that flashback scene.

- ❖ Now let me give you some background information to help you see the relevance of this section to the overall chapter. **The cherished sin in question here that calls for repentance is the sin of adultery and incest.** The King Herod in this story refers to Herod Antipas, one of four sons of Herod the Great. That's the Herod in the birth narratives who famously tried to kill baby Jesus. After Herod the Great died, the kingdom he ruled (under the auspices of the Roman Empire) was divided into four parts to be governed by his four sons.

- ❖ **Herod Antipas merely governed a fourth of his father's kingdom as a tetrarch.** He never officially received the title of king. But he liked to think of himself as one. So by calling him *King* Herod, Mark could be taking a subtle jab at Herod. Since it was well known that he longed to possess the dignity and authority of a king but never obtained it.
 - Now one of Herod Antipas's half-brothers and fellow tetrarch was named Herod Philip, and another half-brother of his had a daughter named Herodias. This would be Herod Antipas's niece. Now Herodias ends up marrying Philip, and they have a daughter named Salome, who is most likely the daughter mentioned in the text.
 - **Now according to ancient accounts, Herod Antipas fell in love with Herodias, his half-brother's wife and his niece.** And he was able to arrange for both of them to divorce their spouses in order to marry each other. If you think the House of Windsor in the UK is dealing with a lot of drama right now, just realize this is next level. The House of Herod was an utter mess.

- ❖ And John the Baptizer was not shy about calling out sin and calling people to repentance. Remember how he was introduced to us in Mark 1 as proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin (1:4). **He was boldly preaching to power, telling the governing tetrarch that he's in sin and needs to turn away from it.** Look at v18, *"For John had been saying to Herod, 'It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife.'"*
 - Well, that didn't make John very popular in Herod's court. Especially to Herodias. The text says she held a grudge against John and wanted him put to death. But it was actually Herod who kept her from getting her wish. He arrested John and threw him in prison, but he refused to execute him because he actually feared John. Look at v20, *"for Herod feared John, knowing that he was a righteous and holy man, and he kept him safe. When he heard him, he was greatly perplexed, and yet he heard him gladly."*

- ❖ On one hand, I'm sure John drove Herod mad. Every time he heard him, I'm sure John took the opportunity to remind him of his need to repent. But at the same time, the text says he heard John gladly. **I think, deep down, Herod knew he was in sin and knew he needed to repent in order to receive God's forgiveness.** I think that hope of forgiveness extended to him is what gladdened him. But ultimately the need to repent of his cherished sin in order to enjoy that forgiveness is what maddened him.
 - **Now as the story goes, one day on his birthday, Herodias saw the perfect opportunity to trap her husband and force his hand to execute John.** Herod was hosting a huge banquet with all the leading men of Galilee, and his stepdaughter Salome performed a dance for them (likely an erotic one). And Herod, in the presence of all his guests, grants her any wish. *"Whatever you ask me, I will give you."*
 - She turns to her mother to ask what she should ask for, and her mother tells her, *"The head of John the Baptist."* Now Herod was in a bind. Look at v26, *"²⁶And the king was exceedingly sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he did not want to break his word to her. ²⁷And immediately the king sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. He went and beheaded him in the prison."* And John's head was brought on a platter, given to the girl, who immediately gave it to her mother. It was a gruesome scene.

- ❖ But it's an important scene. **It makes graphically clear how dangerous our message is.** As followers of Jesus, we can easily grow—not only familiar with Jesus—but with his message of repentance. **We can forget how offensive and repulsive it is to unregenerate ears.**
 - To those who have yet to relinquish their cherished sins, the call to turn away from them and turn towards Jesus in obedience may seem impossible. It sounds like a cruel ask. **They have so deeply embraced and identified with their sin that a call to repentance feels like a personal attack at the core of their being.** If you feel like you can't live without a particular sinful behavior or relationship, it's no surprise that any challenge to it sounds harsh and ruthless. You can see why some people will resist the message of repentance with all their might.

Forewarned by the Death of the Baptizer

- ❖ This is why this side story about the death of John the Baptizer was included—to serve as a forewarning. **To forewarn followers of Jesus about what's going to happen if we stay faithful in the mission he's sent us on.** If we go about proclaiming a message of repentance for the forgiveness of our sins.
 - **Now perhaps in our context we don't have to worry about anyone arresting us or putting us to death.** That can't be said of our brothers and sisters in many countries around the world closed to the proclamation of the gospel. Their situation is far more similar to John's. **But while the opposition we face may not reach that level, don't be surprised to encounter people who take offense at the message you preach.**
- ❖ **That, of course, assumes you're preaching the same message of repentance that generated so much offense in our text.** Which makes you wonder. If no one opposes the message you preach—if the gospel you share is universally welcomed and received—then it makes you wonder if you've got it right.
 - **By the grace of God and the power of his Spirit, you should expect to encounter some good soil that receives the seed you sow and bears good fruit.** It shouldn't be *all* rejection and opposition. **But at the same time, you wouldn't expect your message to be universally welcomed and received by all.** If it is, then you would do well to reevaluate what exactly you're sharing.
 - **The fact is no one will oppose a gospel of mere affirmation.** A message that says God affirms you in every which way you feel will always enjoy universal acceptance. But a gospel that calls you to repent of cherished sins and to submit all that you think and feel under the authority of Christ and his Word—that message itself is bound to generate some opposition.
- ❖ **My point is that, in our proclamation of the gospel, we should be prepared to offend. But, hear me clearly, to offend people should never be our goal.** The goal is to see God glorified in their salvation. We want to see people led to repentance by the kindness of God. Forgiven of their sins. And flourishing as disciples under Jesus's loving rule.
 - So while we should make sure our message preserves the sharper edges that call for repentance, let's do our best to keep Jesus and the grace of his cross at the core of what we share.

- ❖ I think Mark gets this. **And it's why John the Baptizer's death is presented in such a way that it prefigures Jesus's death.** There's a connection between them. Just as John is wrongly arrested (1:14), Jesus is wrongly delivered into the hands of evil men (9:31; 10:33; 13:9; 15:1). Just as John is executed by a feckless, reluctant ruler manipulated by others plotting his death, Jesus is handed over to death by another ruler being similarly played.
 - Just as Herodias seized an opportunity (*eukarious*) to betray John (6:21), Judas sought a similar opportunity (*eukarious*) to betray Jesus (14:11). And when Jesus was dying on the cross, recall how people taunted him in his last moments, thinking he's crying out to the prophet Elijah for rescue. There are many similarities.

- ❖ But, of course, there's a key difference between the two. **While John died because of the sins of others, Jesus died *for* the sins of others.** And that's the good news of the cross that needs to be stressed at the center of our gospel. **Yes, he's calling you to turn and walk away from that cherished sin in your life, but he offers, in return, forgiveness, freedom, and a joy that lasts forever.** Friends, that's a gift of grace well worth receiving and available to all who receive Jesus by faith.