

Jesus is Greater Mark 6:14-6:56

Last week... Incredible testimonies ... ordinary things with gospel intentionality – you guys are pointing people to Jesus... keep it up! If you're new to IDC, we're all about Jesus. If you're not a Xian, we're glad you're here.... We are looking at this one dominant question, the question of all questions, "Who is Jesus?"

In Mark 6:14-46, Mark is advancing his dominant themes in the book; that is, **(1) to display the identity of Jesus**, and **(2) to explain what it means to follow Jesus**.

(1) The Identity of Jesus. We see this theme in two major ways. First, Mark shares the common **the word on the street about Jesus** – some think Jesus is John the Baptist, others Elijah, or another prophet (see also Mark 8:27-30). The other way the identity of Jesus is highlighted is through **contrasts**. Jesus is **contrasted with Herod, and other Old Testament heroes and Messianic leaders**. This story about King Herod's feast is contrasted with Jesus' feast, the feeding of the 5,000. Within Jesus' feast other contrasts can be made as we find an allusion to a zealot leader, and references to Moses and Elijah/Elisha. We see that Jesus **is greater than all of them**.

(2) Following Jesus. How do we see discipleship principles in these narratives? Notice that the story about John the Baptist is placed in between the disciples mission trip (**6:13, 30**). So clearly, Mark wants us to understanding something about discipleship here. The lesson seems to be a continuation of the idea that **following Jesus will involve rejection, and even persecution**. The disciples must continue down the road of suffering for Christ's sake. Further, the miracles are intended to instruct the disciples....

Let's first walk through our text, considering the identity of Jesus through **five contrasts**, and then we will think back through the text and list some principles for following Jesus.

The Identity of Jesus

1. Jesus Is a Greater King than Herod (6:14-29)

Of course, this isn't that hard. This is a low bar. It's like saying you **are taller than a hobbit**. Jesus calls Herod a "fox" (Lk 13:32) for his cunning and malice.

14: Herod hears about the fame of Jesus, perhaps following the mission of the twelve?

14b: The Herodian family tree was very twisted and it's easy to get things confused. Four Herods rule in the NT. They ruled the Palestine area with the delegated power of Rome, and were enemies of God's people. In our story we are talking about **Herod Antipas**, the second ruler we find in the NT. Later in Acts we read of **Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12)**, and **Agrippa II (Acts 25-26)**

- Mark refers to Herod Antipas as “**king,**” even though this was merely a popular title. He was actually the Roman tetrarch, or governor, of Galilee. (“**tetrarch**” – ruler of a fourth part [of Palestine])
- Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. Herod the Great **had ten wives**, and slaughtered of the male babies under (Matt 2:16-18) two years of age in Bethlehem. Herod the Great was insane. He killed some of his own sons in order to protect his throne from them. **One of his murdered sons had a daughter, Herodias (Mark 6:17) who was married to one of Herod’s other sons, Herod Philip.** So Herod Philip married his niece, and they had a daughter, **Salome.** Salome does the erotic dance here in the story (6:22).
- **Herod Antipas seduced his niece, Herodias, in Rome and stole her away from his half-brother, Philip. So He divorced his own wife to marry his niece, which was his half-brother’s wife.** This broke Jewish law, and was an obvious picture of immorality. **John the Baptist rebuked Herod publicly for his adultery.** Herod was conflicted regarding John. He sensed that he was holy, and was intrigued by the message; Herodias hated John. (See Luke 23 for Herod’s meeting with Jesus before the crucifixion).

So that’s Herod. He’s wicked, evil. He married his niece, whom he stole from his brother (who had first married the niece. One girl was in the mix, Salome).

14c-16: The identity of Jesus is on the big question. You will hear these kinds of guesses later in Mark 8:27-30.

17-20: Flashback. Mark provides the background to John’s death... Notice Herodias’ hatred, and how conflicted Herod is. He’s a man of great contradictions.

21-29: Mark provides the details of John’s death.

- **21:** Herod throws himself a birthday party, and **invites the big shots.** These guys are **willing accomplices to this murder.** **Lust and murder** is bound up together in this story, as it so often is.
 - **Herod is not just immoral, but also insecure.**
 - “**Insecure leaders always need attention**” (DeYoung). He wants the big guys to notice him.
- **22:** Salome does an erotic dance for Herod. And he and all the guys love it. Not much has changed. **Guys love dancing girls; girls love attention. The whole thing is a picture of debauchery.** **Young people, don’t follow this teenage girl – don’t seek the attention of others through immoral actions whether on technology or physically.** This is the way of destruction. We shall see a different kind of feast in a moment...
- **23:** Herod exaggerates what he will do for her, but still takes an oath...
- **24:** Her mother, Herodias, doesn’t hesitate. She wants John the Baptist’s head. She reminds me of Jezebel, who took the innocent life of Naboth.
- **25:** Salome, though only a teenager, participates in the evil plot, and adds the detail, “On a platter.”
 - **Young people, you are responsible for your actions.** Peer pressure may be

present, but that doesn't excuse your actions.

- **26-27:** Herod didn't really want to kill him, but he made a public oath. So in order to save face, and because he was a **coward, he goes along with it.**
 - Notice, that Herod of **cruel because he is a coward!**
 - A lot of bullies are bullies because of fear.
 - Herod is a spineless man.
 - **Revelation 21:8, the first group of people mentioned: "cowards."**
 - **27b:** JB is killed. A **simple, bureaucratic decision and boom.** Dead.
 - **How easy it is to slaughter innocent people. This sort of abuse of power happens in countless ways in this fallen world.**
- **28:** The disciples take the body; **the only act of decency in the story.**
- This whole event probably took place in Herod's palace, which was big enough to include a prison.
- **29:** Taking JB's death **prepares the reader for the violent and shameful death of Jesus, and serves as a reminder of the cost of following Jesus.**

How is He Inferior to Jesus? The comparisons are endless, but let me just highlight a few based on Mark's flashback to Herod's beheading of JB. (We have some super creative technology: look, a chart! Next week is a hologram)

"King" Herod	King Jesus
Tried to Appear Impressive	Was/Is Impressive
Arrogant	Humble
No Self-control	Prays When in Crisis and Stays on Mission
Killed Others	Served and Trained Others
Unsettled Conscious	Lived with Total Integrity
Partied with the Big Shots	Hung Out with Ordinary People
A Coward-Bully	A Compassionate, Bold Savior
Abused Power	Used Power to Teach/Bless Others
Had an Evil Birthday Party	Satisfied Over 5,000 with Two Fish Sandwiches, Foreshadows the Great Messianic Banquet

2. Jesus Is a Greater Shepherd than Moses (6:30-44)

There are a number of Old Testament echoes in this story. **Jesus is the New Moses, leading a New Exodus...** John 6 provides explicit connection to Moses.

30: Apostles return and are tired.

31: Allusions of the **Exodus - "desolate place" and "rest."**

32-33: People come running after Jesus.

34: Jesus motivated by compassion, seeing that they are like **"Sheep without a shepherd."** (cf., Ezek 34:1-24)

- The religious leaders of Israel weren't shepherds (Jn 10:12-13)

- This image recalls Moses' **prayer to God to appoint a successor after his death**, leading the people into the Promised Land (which God does with Joshua):

Numbers 27

¹⁵ Moses spoke to the LORD, saying, ¹⁶ "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, appoint a man over the congregation ¹⁷ who shall go out before them and come in before them, who shall lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be as sheep that have no shepherd."

34b: This word for "compassion" is only used of Jesus in the NT. **As an act of compassion, Jesus teaches the multitude.** This remains the job of Shepherds today, to teach the Word. The primary job of the shepherd is not to pet the sheep, but to feed the sheep.

Read verses 35-38

39-40: After the whole question of "How should we feed this multitude?" (35-38) we find more allusions to Moses as Jesus has **divided them into groups.** This reflects the encampment in Israel (Ex 18:21, 25).

41: Further, the bread and fish parallel the manna and quail.

42: They were satisfied unlike the grumbling people in the wilderness.

"Jesus presides over the meal like a Jewish Father" (Edwards)

43-44: Unlike the manna that couldn't be eaten later, Jesus' bread is collected for later use.

5,000 men plus women and children – 15-20 thousand people

- Abundance of Food suggests that endless bounty of Jesus' grace and mercy.

Jesus is the Shepherd that satisfies his people.

- Notice Mark's mention of "**green grass.**"
- The Good Shepherd leads his people to the Green Pastures (**Ps 23**).

The people are "**satisfied.**" Jesus doesn't just give us a little bag of peanuts, like on an airplane. He satisfies our hunger completely. "**We shall not want.**"

There's nothing worse than starving on a plane, and **having a tiny little bag of 12 peanuts given to you. You're like "How long can I nibble on these..."** Jesus doesn't give us a **snack.** He satisfies. In John 6, Jesus says after this miracle, "I am the Bread of Life." This bread is pointing to Himself.

Jesus cares for the people both physically and spiritually. He gives them bread, and he gives them truth. **He models an integrative model of mission;** caring for people's total well-being.

Another Feast: The language of this passage also points ahead to the Last Supper, which then points ahead to the Great Banquet. Garland calls it a "**Foretoken of the Last Supper**" (256). His action in verses 41 matches the action taken in Mark 14:22.

3. Jesus Is a Greater Miracle Worker than Elijah/Elisha (6:41-44)

Some people suggested Jesus was Elijah. Jesus was like these miracle working prophets, but his miracle here was greater than the feeding-miracles of these prophets.

1 Kings 17:8-16: Elijah provides for the widow of Zarephath with a jar of flour and jug of oil that never ran out.

2 Kings 4:42-44: Elisha fed one hundred prophets with 20 barley loaves. Jesus feeds 5,000 men with five loaves!

Some try to explain this miracle away. There have been a number of **failed attempts:**

- “Jesus had a secret stash of food hidden away.” He stood at the entrance of a cave where bread was hidden. This is ridiculous.
- “Rich and Pious ladies brought more food.”
- **“A miracle of sharing.” This is the dumbest explanation; that is, that** the whole crowd shared what they had. Really? 15-20,000 people sharing 2 fish sandwiches and a piece of bread. **What did they do, lick it?**
- Still others suggest **the number of people was exaggerated.** There’s no reason to believe this, in fact, everything in the text suggest a great number of people, with allusions to a revolution being afoot (next comparison).

No, this is what we see. **We see Jesus as greater than Moses and Elijah.**

Only God can feed people in the wilderness like this.

“He opens His hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing” (Ps 145:16).

4. Jesus Is a Greater Savior than Any Political Leader (6:44-46; cf., John 6:15)

Often this story of the feeding of the 5,000 is in **children’s books, and it has pictures of happy families and children. But this is probably misleading. There are clues in the text suggesting that what might be happening here is a radical political uprising.** Here are some of the clues:

1. **Rural Galilee was a stronghold of the Zealot movement.**¹ Judas the Galilean founded the movement. He came from the hills of Bethsaida. Before his time, many in rural Galilee resisted Herod the Great. Many wanted to overthrow Rome militarily.
2. The metaphor: **“the shepherd of sheep”** was a common figure of speech for a Joshua-like military hero who would muster Israel’s forces for war (Num 27:17; 1 Kgs 22:17//2 Chr 18:16; Jer 10:21; Ezek 34:5; 37:24; Nah 3:18; Zech 13:7; Jdt 11:19).
3. The language in verses 31 and 33 of people **“coming and going”** may suggests a **clandestine movement afoot**

¹ Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark* (p. 194). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

4. **“Men.”** The term used in verse 44 is gender specific. It refers to 5,000 males. In other words, a military ready to conquer with the Messiah.
5. We see this political desire for a conquering military King **in John 6**, where John says, right after the feeding of the 5,000: **“Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself. (Jn 6:15)**

45-46: Because the people were ready to make Him King (which the disciples would have loved) Jesus made his disciples get in the boat and then he dismissed the crowds. Not sure how he did this! But this must have been skillful leadership to dismiss this rowdy crowd.

Then he departs for prayer. Why? It’s simple: Jesus needs to get away with the Father to stay focused on the mission. He’s not a military king, but a Savior.

He’s brokenhearted because people don’t have a leader. But his way is the way of the cross, not the way of a political leader. So gets quiet before the Father.

Edwards says: “The mention of prayer in this context is a further clue of a messianic groundswell, for Mark notes Jesus praying at only three points in his ministry (1:35; 6:45; 14:35–39). Each prayer is at night and in a lonely place, each finds the disciples removed from him and failing to understand his mission, and in each Jesus faces a formative decision or crisis. Following the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus reaffirms by prayer his calling to express his divine Sonship as a servant rather than as a freedom fighter against Rome.”²

Jesus chose the hard road, not the easy road; he went through hell so that we don’t.

Hebrews tells us that Jesus was **“tempted in all points”** and this must have been one of the temptations, the temptation to use his power as a military conqueror. But he got alone with the Father and stayed focused.

Jesus came as a suffering-servant, a substitutionary sacrifice for sinners, not a Military King.

He may not have been the type of Messiah the people wanted on the hillside, but he was the type of Messiah they needed!

Jesus is better than any politician or military leader.

5. Jesus Is Greater in Glory than Anyone (Mark 6:47-56)

We transition now to the story of **“The Boys in the Boat.”** Perhaps some of you have read this recent novel about a group of men who won the 1936 Gold medal in Berlin. Rowing, as some argue scientifically, is like playing two back-to-back basketball games. Here we read of the original Boys in the Boat. **This is the canonized version! (CJ)**

² Edwards, J. R. (2002). *The Gospel according to Mark* (p. 197). Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos.

The disciples are rowing against a strong headwind. **They are in a battle not for a gold medal, but for survival.**

And actually this story is **intended for their training as a disciple. It was intended to prepare them for an encounter with the Son of God.** And now, this story helps us encounter the Son of God in power.

47: By the time Jesus was finished praying, it was quite late. The disciples were alone on the sea. **Trouble happens each time they're away from Jesus.** The storm isn't as ferocious as the previous encounter, but it was still tough night!

48-50: Jesus sees the disciples struggling between 3am-6am (Mark uses Roman reckoning of time for his original readers). When he approaches them, **they think he's a ghost.**

It's not hard to blame the disciples very much. **They have two options: Rabbi is walking on water or it's a ghost.** If you've never seen anyone walking "on" the water, then a ghost makes about as much sense.

When they see him they are terrified, but he reassures them and urges them to not be afraid.

Really? Many try to explain this miracle away also....

- "He was walking on a sandbar." NO, these disciples knew this lake well.
- "He was walking along the shoreline." But this misses the whole point of the story too, and doesn't take into account the OT echoes.

51-52: He got in the boat. I'm sure they were happy about that!

"Jesus, Get in the boat! Sit here. Don't fall asleep!"

The wind ceases (again). They were **astounded.** Big time amazement! This is not a "you rock, Jesus." But a "We've never seen anything like this.

If a guy makes a shot at half court blindfolded - that's astonishing. But what would be really astonishing is if he starts flying with his arms after making the shot- that's a "Let's get out of here" moment! Jesus has graduated to a whole new level of astonishment.

They hadn't really grasped the significance of the feeding of the five thousand. They didn't **get what had "went down on the mound."**

They marveled at the miracle but missed the point of the miracle. The miracle was intended to point them to the identity of the miracle worker!

53-56: Meanwhile after getting to the other side, Jesus popularity continues. **The disciples may not realize the glory of Jesus yet; the crowd recognizes that he has power to heal.** Jesus is popular. Jesus is puzzling.

Two Ways Jesus Reveals His Unparalleled Glory

You can't miss two phrases in this very popular story.

1. "He meant to pass by them" (48)

What does this mean?

- Did Jesus try to sneak up behind them and shake them? Was it a little prank?
- Was he just going to wave as he walked by, like someone riding a jet sky?
- Does he mean to not get in the boat, just go by them, but then change his mind when seeing them in distress? No. He already knows they're in distress.

There's a better explanation.

- The verb *parerchomai* ("to pass by") when connected to divinity refers to an epiphany.
- This is a deliberate identification of Jesus' deity.
- This statement **echoes Exodus 33-34 and 1 Kings 19:11-12**, with both Moses and Elijah.

Exodus 33 – After the horrid golden calf incident, Moses is pleading with God:

¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I **have passed by.** ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Exodus 34

⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶The LORD **passed before him** and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." ⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

1 Kings 19:11-12 – After a time of discouragement, God reveals His glory to Elijah And behold, **the LORD passed by**, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake....

Likewise, **Jesus is revealing His transcendent majesty to these disciples in order to reassure them.** He displays His identity that they may **know Him, marvel at Him, and trust Him.**

Job 9:

⁸ He alone stretches out the heavens
and treads on the waves of the sea....
¹¹ If He passes by me, I wouldn't see Him;
if He goes right by, I wouldn't recognize Him.

But notice the difference.

Moses could only see the backside, and Job couldn't see Him.

Jesus, passed by the disciples so that they may see Him.

Jesus came to reveal the glory of God to them.

2. "It is I" (50).

- This expression also has echoes of the Exodus.
- Jesus actually greets the disciples with the formula for God's self-revelation, "I Am." (*ego eimi*). (John 8:58)
- In the Greek, "it is simply "I am." "Have courage, I Am."
- **Jesus is not merely a successor to Moses; He's God!**
- **The one who parted the Red Sea walks on water.**
- **Jesus talks like God talks, and walks like God walks.**
- **Jesus isn't trying to pull a stunt; He's revealing His glory.**
- **The most important thing about your ministry going forward is Me.**

The Compassion of the I Am

I love the simplicity of the words, "Do not be afraid."

He doesn't give a great lesson on the mysteries of the universe.

He simply says in compassion, "I am God, Don't be afraid."

Like a parent saying to their child after they have a bad dream, "Don't be afraid."

Even greater than that assurance, "I Am, don't be afraid."

Jesus sent them away; Jesus saw them; Jesus reassured Him. We are never ought of His sight, and when He is with us, we need not be afraid.

Following Jesus

1. In an age of evil, expect opposition when speaking the truth.

- John the Baptist lost his head for telling people to repent.
- But Jesus puts heads back on. Just keep speaking it.
- If you're goal is to be liked by everyone, don't teach the Bible.
- Our goal should be faithfulness not popularity.
- **It wasn't popular for pastors to preach against slavery in 1860, or against segregation in 1960, when members had slaves, and then later, their parishoners wanted the schools segregated. But we must take our stand with the truth of Scripture!** Even if it means you lose your job; or in the case of JB, his head.
- Don't be a jerk. John the Baptist was the greatest man born of woman. He was humble. He had human struggle (Luke 7), but he didn't cave in. He spoke truth.

2. In an age of physical and spiritual hunger, be devoted to teaching and compassion ministries.

- Jesus fed people with the word and with food. Let's do the same.
- Kids who are starving to death need a plate of food.
- Girls trapped in a brothel need rescued.
- As we display compassion, let's tell them the good news about the Shepherd who will satisfy their souls.
- Whitefield – Orphanages, Wesley, prisons, McCheyne – broken part of the city

3. In an age of self-centeredness, give selflessly for the good of others.

- John gives us a more full picture. The primary purpose of the feeding of the 5,000 is not about giving, but there's something to learn here. We tend to focus on we don't have, instead of what we do have.
- Give what you have, because you know how God may multiply it.
- God can multiply things! Your 20 bucks may not seem like much, but just give it.
 - The little boy didn't say, "**These are my fish sandwiches! Why don't you find someone in the crowd who owns a bread store and have him underwrite this thing.**" No, he says, "Okay, you can have it."
 - You may be so weak financial that you thinking giving 10% should mean you take money out the offering! But watch this story.
 - Five loaves and two fish were nothing, but he gave it.
 - Giving weans you off the love of money. You need to give a whole lot more than God needs to receive!
 - It keeps you from finding security in money. Jesus gives them leftovers. One for each disciple! He's teaching them to trust in him.
 - It gets you in "the game" so to speak. You get involved in the ministry. When you see kids adopted, a building purchased and people gathering in it, church planters preaching the gospel, you can say, "I gave my two fish!"

4. In an age of busyness and pressure, get alone with the Father for prayer.

- Jesus does this in seasons of great pressure, in the midst of great crowds.
- In a day of constant distraction, go to the mountain!
- FOMO – Fear of Missing Out.
- It's okay to miss out on Facebook for a week.
- What you should fear missing out is communion with the Father!

5. In an age of anxiety and despair, trust in the I AM.

- He treads on the seas. He feeds multitudes. Don't panic. Don't dismay. Cast your care upon him. Realize that He can do whatever He pleases!

6. In an age of pain and suffering, anticipate the return of the King.

- Jesus wasn't the Military ruler the people wanted; He was the Savior.

- His healings at the end of this chapter foreshadows the day in which he brings perfect shalom to this world.

This hope is made possible because **Jesus stayed on mission.**

The next time we find him praying is **the garden of Gethsemane**, hours before His sacrificial death at Calvary.

And this story reminds us that Jesus wasn't a pathetic, weak victim of Rome. Overcome by Roman power? Please.

Jesus Christ is Lord over the Sabbath.

He forgives sins.

He cleanses lepers.

He calms storms.

He transforms demoniacs.

He heals the sick.

He raises the dead.

He feeds thousands.

He walks on water.

Jesus said, "No one takes my life, I lay it down."

Praise God, Jesus finished the mission.

Don't be afraid. Trust the all-powerful, compassionate Savior.

He is the greatest, and He is greatly to be praised.

