

Gospel of Mark

January 31, 2010

“Mid-Term Exams”

Mark 6:30-56

I. Transition to Mid-Term Exams for the Apostles: Mark 6:30-31

Mark 6:30-31

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

NIV

We have seen the Apostles following Jesus, sometimes a little bewildered by what He does, but they keep following Him. Then, He sends them on their own mission trip to apply what He has been teaching them. They appear to do well in this effort. So, we are ready for the next stage in their education. Jesus will test them to see if they understand his mission in this world.

In these two transition verses, we see that the hectic activities have taken a toll on Jesus and the apostles. Jesus suggested some peace and quiet for rest and rehabilitation. The apostles' responses are not given, but they probably heartedly agreed.

II. Not Remote Enough: Mark 6:32-34

Mark 6:32-34

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

NIV



Verse 32 The “solitary place” indicates a “wilderness-place apart.” Luke indicates that this is near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), although as we will see the location is a little confusing by the end of the chapter.

Verse 33 The Galilee is a relatively small round lake. The people apparently knew where Jesus was going. So, they rushed ahead along the shore and got there before Jesus did.

Verse 34 Notice Jesus' compassion for the people; how would you characterize that compassion?

Verse 34 Remember that Jesus wanted to be alone with His disciples. Hopefully, He and the disciples had eaten while in the boat because they were hounded when they arrived at their destination; they had virtually no food when they got there. In any case, on seeing the crowd, Jesus starts teaching them. The image of a shepherd caring for his dumb sheep is used.

Verse 34 What are some of your favorite “shepherd” passages in the Bible?

III. Lack of Understanding: Mark 6:35-37

Mark 6:35-37

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 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 eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"

NIV

The counterparts for the feeding of the 5000 are Matthew 14:13-21, Luke 9:10-16, and John 6:1-15).

Verse 35 Again, they were in an isolated place. It was perhaps 3:00 pm.

Verse 36 Given the large crowd, the disciples make what they probably think is a reasonable suggestion. They do not know yet that we are about to have one of Jesus' best-known miracles, the feeding of the 5000, the only miracle that made it to all four gospels.

Verse 36 At the end of the feeding, Jesus allows His disciples to proceed ahead without them. In their request, they might have wanted to be alone with Jesus or get to some other destination that had been planned. Jesus saw that the people needed a shepherd and was compassionate to their needs; the disciples do not appear to be considering this need.

Verse 36 The people have a need for Jesus' teaching, but they also have a need for food. The disciples were considering only one of those needs. They were possibly putting their own needs before that of the crowd because they too were getting hungry, because they wanted to be alone with Jesus, or they were to get to another destination.

Verse 37 Notice how the disciples' disbelief grows when Jesus' ask them to do something. To them, the task is impossible, but is it impossible to God? Of course not! And that is what the disciples learn in the events of this portion of Scripture. In our own strength, we are usually inadequate, but God can take however little we might have and "stretch" it to meet the need. The question is whether we are willing to be stretched. John's gospel tells us that Jesus asked this question to test the apostles; they failed the test.

Verse 37 The "eight months of a man's wages" was 200 denarii, where each denarii is worth about one day's wage.

Verse 37 We have just seen a sumptuous feast in Herod's palace. What can Jesus do in the wilderness? (NOTE: An ongoing comparison can be made between Herod bringing death in his palace and Jesus bringing life through food and teaching in the wilderness.)

IV. Feeding of the 5000: Mark 6:38-44

Mark 6:38-44

38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five — and two fish." **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. **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 set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. **42** They all ate and were satisfied, **43** and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. **44** The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

NIV

Verse 38 Much has been made of the numbers in this feeding, but since none of the numbers are explained as to symbolic significance, no verification can be made for any of the speculation...although seven and twelve do have common significance in Scriptures.

Verse 38 Apparently the disciples did not have any food of their own. The five loaves and two fish are from a young boy according to John 6:9.

- Verse 41 Giving thanks for the food in this way was typical of Jewish traditions at the time, both before and after the meal.
- Verse 42 In a land where the common person did not generally have enough to eat and rarely did not get a chance to eat until fully satisfied, this is a tremendous miracle with major impact. Indeed, after this, the crowds might have been following Jesus in the hope that they would be fed in addition to the other miracles.
- Verse 43 If there were 12 disciples collecting the fragments, this would mean that each of them came back with a full basket, probably indicating that there were even more fragments that had not been collected.
- Verse 44 We generally refer to this event as the feeding of the five thousand, but in fact this is only the number of men, not including women and children. While there might have been a higher percentage of men than in the general populace, the total number was likely higher than 10,000 and maybe a lot higher.

V. Interlude: Mark 6:45-48a

Mark 6:45-48a

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. 47 When evening came, 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.

NIV

Why did Jesus dismiss the disciples? Perhaps, they wanted to go to be somewhere else, but Jesus wanted to stay for a little while longer with the masses. Also, the people did not necessarily know of this miracle, but the disciples did; their dismissal might have been done to keep them from speaking about it to the people. Also, as we will see, Jesus wants to test the disciples again.

Apparently, Jesus ends His teaching session with the multitudes after the disciples left. It is hard to say how much longer that He taught them. It could have been another hour or two.

Finally, by Himself, He goes up the side on an unknown mountain to pray. What do you think that He prayed?

Apparently, Jesus prays from about dusk (or a little later) to at least 3:00 am (fourth watch). It is not all that clear where the disciples were heading at this point. They start from a deserted spot not too far from Bethsaida. So, it is a little surprising that they are still struggling in the middle of the lake if the town of Bethsaida is their destination. The most likely explanation is that the wind was so strong that they were going in the wrong direction.

VI. Walking on Water: Mark 6:48b-52

Mark 6:48b-52

About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 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." 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.

NIV

The counterparts are Matthew 14:22-33 and John 6:16-21. (NOTE: The Matthew counterpart describes Peter's attempt at walking on water.)

- Verse 48 Seeing that His disciples are struggling without Him, He has compassion for them and proceeds to go to them...by walking on water! Generally, we see the disciples struggling or in some kind of difficulty when Jesus is not with them.
- Verse 48 The last sentence in the NIV has caused a lot of speculation. It might mean:
- Jesus was coming to them, intended to pass their way (per Lane)
 - An allusion to Job 9:8, 11.
 - An allusion to Exodus 34 where God passes by Moses on the mountain.
 - Jesus was going to pass by them waiting for them to call out to Him
 - Jesus was passing beside or parallel to them.
- Verse 48 If they started late in the day and had been rowing for most of the night, basically not making much progress and perhaps going in the wrong direction, the disciples must have been very tired.
- Verse 49 It is the middle of the night; they see someone or something walking on water. Can we criticize them for being afraid? Would we have done better? Certainly, we also see a lack of faith in them. What can we learn from their reaction? Even the most devout believer will be surprised at the things that God does. See Eph. 3:20-21.
- Verse 49 Do you think that Jesus knew that His disciples would react this way? Probably yes. So, why did He do it.
- Verse 50 Jesus makes an “I am” statement. (NOTE: That is the literal translation of “It is I.”)
- Verse 51 The disciples were struggling with the wind, which is why Jesus came to them. Once there, the wind dies down. What impact do you think that this episode had on the apostles?
- Verse 52 Only Mark records the hardening of their hearts. In what way were their hearts hardened? Certainly, it is clear that the disciples do not fully understand who Jesus is. In a sense, they fail their mid-term exam. Fortunately, “finals” were given on the day of Pentecost.

VII. The Hectic Pace Begins Again: Mark 6:53-56

Mark 6:53-56

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. **54** As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. **55** They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. **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 him were healed.

NIV

They had started for nearby Bethsaida and ended up at Gennesaret.

The people were flocking to Jesus for physical healing, but we do not see them coming to Him for spiritual healing. As far as spiritual needs are concerned, the people are clearly sheep without a shepherd.

If anything, we see an escalation of the acclaim for Jesus as a miracle worker. They are not just following Him. They are also apparently warehousing their marketplaces in need of healing when they anticipated that He was near.