

The Jesus Identity

Studies in Mark's Gospel

Introduction: Mark 6

Why do you think it is important to get Jesus' identity correct?

The beginning of chapter 6 describes the stance of Jesus' hometown neighbours. Their lack of faith is contrasted with the faith of Jairus and the woman healed of her bleeding and in the previous chapter. So in Mark 5 the kingdom of God is arriving but some do not believe nor do they repent. Others, however, do put their faith in Jesus and are cleansed, have their lives put back together (eg 'Legion', Mk5:1-20) or even receive their dead back to life. The dramatic arrival of the kingdom of God in this way begs a very important question. Who is this 'Jesus', who not only announces the arrival of the kingdom but also seems to bring it with him?

'Who is this man?' becomes the focus of the next few chapters of Mark.

Mark 6:6b-13

1. The advance of the kingdom of God accelerates as 'the apostles' (sent ones) multiply Jesus' ministry throughout the Galilee region. What are the signs of the kingdom's arrival that accompany the apostles' call to repent?

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2. Is this apostolic ministry unique to that time and place or is a model for our church today? Why or why not?

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King Herod was the half Jew – half Roman Ruler over the northern parts of Old Testament Israel. What does this narrative show about his character as a Ruler?

Mark 6:14-29

3. Mark sandwiches his account of Herod's execution of John the Baptist between Jesus' sending out of the 12 (6:12) and their return (6:30). What do you think is the main point of the account?

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4. What is the effect of setting it next to (between) the mission of the 12?

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5. It seems that the question, 'Who is Jesus?' is on everyone's lips. What are some of the possible answers raised in this passage?

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6. What do you think might be the implications of Jesus being --
 - (i) an Old Testament Prophet?
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 - (ii) Elijah
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 - (iii) John the Baptist come back to life?
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Elijah-- for further thought: Mal 4:5; Mk 9:11-13; Mt 11:14.

Mark 6:30-52

In this section Jesus feeds the 5000 and then returns to the other side of the Sea of Galilee by walking across the water. Both are undoubtedly great miracles that show us that Jesus has power to override the usual laws of physics: he can create something from nothing (food!) and he can change the density of water such that he can walk across it. Recalling the question on everyone's lips—'Who is this Man?'—we need to think further about what Jesus' actions here say about his identity.

Many good Sunday School lessons lead us to think about the disciples response to Jesus in this passage—their faith was being stretched. However, in this case, Jesus does not highlight their faith (or lack of it). Instead, we are being asked to consider Jesus and what these events say about him.

7. Which other great figure of the Bible miraculously feeds God's people in the wilderness? (Hint: Exodus 16:1-17).
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8. Which other great figure of the Bible crosses the Sea to peace and safety, taking God's people with him? (Hint: Exodus 14:5-18).
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9. As yet, Jesus' disciples do not understand the full significance of the bread in the wilderness or crossing the sea (Mk 6:52) but this 'New Moses' is a figure promised in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (cf. Deut 34:10). What is the role of the promised 'New Moses'?
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10. (Optional) In what way did the 'Old Moses' fail such that God would send a 'New Moses' to do the job properly and fully? (Hint: see Heb 3:5-4:3a)
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11. If Jesus is the 'New Moses' who speaks directly from God, carrying all this authority, and whose mission is to bring God's people into his promised 'Rest', what do we need to do? Practically speaking, what will this look like for you (give examples)?
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