Mark Lesson 18 (2022)

**JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE TO PREACH GOD’S KINGDOM**

Mark 6:6b-30

Key Verse: 6:12-13

“They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.”

 Today’s passage, 6:6b-30, is another sandwich section in Mark’s account (5:21-43). While describing the preaching and healing ministry of Jesus’ disciples (6b-13, 30), Mark inserted the long story of the death of John the Baptist by King Herod (14-29). Hearing the news of the ministry of Jesus’ disciples in his territory, Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, was deeply concerned about the identity of Jesus. We wonder why Mark included the cruel death of John the Baptist at this point. This morning, we will think about the indication of John’s death and what Jesus’ sending out his disciples reveals about the characteristics of God’s kingdom work back then and now.

 Look at verse 6b. “Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.” In the previous passage, we learned how Jesus was humiliated and rejected by his hometown people before his own disciples and in public. Yet, he didn’t lose his confidence in God’s call for what he was doing. He continued to minister to the people in other towns and villages in Galilee. What he taught to them was not Moses’ law or religious stuff. He taught them how God could set people free from the bondage of sin and death through the grace of forgiveness, for which the Jewish religious leaders hated and rejected him so much and were even ready to kill. Knowing that his days on earth would not be long, Jesus had to prepare his disciples for their future tasks.

 Look at verse 7. “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.” Jesus authorized the twelve disciples to be his representatives with spiritual power over impure spirits. During Jesus’ Galilean ministry, his disciples were observers. But it would be the first time they would participate in Jesus’ messianic ministry as primary workers. Jesus sent them out two by two, probably to support one another. We don’t know who went with whom. The twelve disciples were divided into six teams and spread out into the villages in Galilee. Some commentators say there were more than 12, possibly 72 based on Luke’s account. (Lk. 10:1-24)

 Verses 8-11 describe Jesus’ instructions for their mission trip. Look at verses 8-11. “There were his instructions: ‘Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. Wear sandals but not an extra shirt. Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 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.’” It’s hard to understand why Jesus gave those seemingly strict instructions. But it seems Jesus wanted them not to spend too much time and energy preparing and depending on their human resources for their short mission trip. Instead, they should focus on their primary tasks by relying on God’s provision, protection, and guidance. We don’t know how long their mission trip lasted. It could be weeks or even months. They had no other choice for their challenging tasks than to rely on God.

 How did they do their job? Look at verses 12-13. “They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.” What the twelve did was the same things that Jesus did in his ministry: preaching of God’s kingdom, casting out demons, and healing the sick (1:4, 14-15, 32-34, 39; 3:10). When Jesus launched his ministry in Galilee, he proclaimed the good news of God, saying, “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!” (1:14) Jesus also drove out many demons and healed many sick people. The disciples learned that Jesus’ power and authority extended beyond his physical presence and worked through them, just as he authorized them (6:7). Even though it was for training, it indicated that their ministry was an extension of Jesus’ ministry.

It was apparent that Jesus’ new movement was not to restore the kingdom of Israel or David’s kingdom, as many people expected. Instead, it was to promote God’s kingdom in the hearts and lives of people. Even though Jesus’ messianic ministry fulfilled the prophets in the Scripture, it was unprecedented in history. Why? It’s because Jesus’ messianic ministry was the ministry of God’s kingdom. It was never meant to be political or even religious but spiritual. We don’t see the slightest intent of Jesus to change the national or world’s political system directly. It was instead to change people’s hearts from the inside out and restore the wholeness of human souls through the process of repentance and healing.

It's for sure that the disciples experienced Jesus’ power through their mission trip. Yet, I don’t think they fully understood Jesus and his intent. As we see in the following passages, 6:30-8:38, they often conflicted with Jesus as Jesus laid his immediate plan. Their deeply embedded idea collided with that of Jesus. For example, when Jesus predicted his own death at the hand of Jewish religious leaders, Simon Peter rebuked him for being weak (8:27-34). They were not on the same page as Jesus. Considering all these, it was premature to designate these disciples as apostles. They needed further training and education to represent Jesus as his Apostles. In the following section, 6:30-8:38, we see that Jesus gives his full attention to his disciples.

Let’s get back to today’s passage. In verses 14-29, we see that before describing the end of their successful mission trip in verse 30, the author Mark inserted the story of John’s terrible death by King Herod Antipas. King Herod in today’s passage is Herod Antipas, one of many sons of Herod the Great (Mt. 2). He was not a king officially. He was the tetrarch who ruled over the district of Galilee and Perea from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39.

Look at verses 14-16. “King Herod heard about this, for Jesus’ name had become well known. Some were saying, ‘John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him.’ Others said, ‘He is Elijah.’ And still others claimed, ‘He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago.’ But when Herod heard this, he said, ‘John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!’” The impact of the disciples’ powerful mission trip was significant. It raised the question about the identity of Jesus. Some said John the Baptist had risen from the dead, and he was the person doing all those miracles. People speculated that Jesus might be Elijah, the mighty prophet who performed fantastic miracles, including his ascension to heaven by the chariot of fire. The sensation of the disciples’ mission trip also caught the attention of King Herod. His view that Jesus was John resurrected originated from his guilty conscience since he had murdered John.

Verses 17-29 are a flashback account in which Mark describes how John was murdered. Look at verses 17-20. “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 married. For John had been saying to Herod, ‘It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.’ So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 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.” Herod Antipas had John arrested and imprisoned because John constantly challenged him to repent of his unlawful marriage with Herodias.

Why was his marriage to Herodias a problem? Herodias was initially the wife of Herod Philip, his half-brother, with whom she had a daughter Salome. But for some reason, she left her first husband to marry Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas was also one of her uncles and the half-brother of her former husband. (Genogram#1) Their marriage was incestuous and adulterous.

The irony is that even though John rebuked Herod Antipas, he still respected John as a man of God and liked to listen to him. But Herodias didn’t like him at all. She nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. She could not because her new husband, Herod Antipas, liked and respected him. So she was holding grudges against John for a long time. When a woman holds grudges, it’s very dangerous, like Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab, who wanted to kill, the Prophet Elijah (1 King 19).

Look at verses 21-23. “Finally, the opportune time came. On his birthday, Herod gave a banquet for his high officials, military commanders, and the leading men of Galilee. 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.’ And he promised her with an oath, ‘Whatever you ask, I will give you, up to half of my kingdom.’” Herod Antipas had no authority to give away half of his kingdom. Yet, he made an oath out of his pride while drunk. We also make a terrible decision out of pride. Proverbs 16:18 states, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

Look at verses 24-28. “She went out and said to her mother, ‘What shall I ask for?’ ‘The head of John the Baptist,’ she answered. At once, the girl hurried to the king with the request: ‘I want you to give me right now the head of John the Baptist on a platter.’ The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head. The man went, beheaded John in prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.” Herodias didn’t lose her chance to get rid of John the Baptist. Her grudge distorted her thoughts, considering a righteous man her enemy. And she ruined so many people’s lives. It was nothing but a tragic story.

On hearing what had happened to their leader, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. (29) I wonder what went through their minds as they buried their teacher. We wonder if God was in control over all things and why he didn’t save John the Baptist from being murdered by these evil people. We don’t have a simple answer for them. Is God in control over all things? Yes, but not how I would like to understand power and authority. It’s beyond my reason and logic.

Before his execution, John sent two of his disciples and asked Jesus, “Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?” (Mt. 11:3; Lk. 7:19) I am almost sure John asked this question for his disciples and himself. Jesus didn’t answer his question directly. Yet, he said to John’s disciples, “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy and cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is proclaimed to the poor. Blessed is anyone who does not stumble on account of me.”

In his answer to John’s disciples, Jesus explained that God’s kingdom is present in people’s lives despite what is happening in the world. He heals and restores the wholeness of human souls through his compassion and love. God’s kingdom continues to dwell among us even today through the grace of forgiveness of sins, healing people’s wounds and pains, and restoring their souls. The kingdom of God is real. The kingdom of God is God living in us. Do you see it? We can see it only through the eyes of faith.

Let me close today’s sermon. The sins of Herod’s pride and Herodias’ grudge led them to murder an innocent man of God, John the Baptist. Would they have been saved if they had repented of their sins? Of course, yes. We wonder why some people don’t repent even when their sins are apparent. It’s not because they didn’t know that they were doing wrong. It’s because they were not honest with themselves and God. It’s sad and reminds us of what 1 John 1:8-10 states. “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar, and his word is not in us.” It’s easy to blame others for our unhappiness. But as long as we blame others, we are rejecting God. We miss the golden chance of God’s healing and restoration in our lives. The gospel Jesus preached 2,000 years ago is the good news today. It’s the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. But we must be honest with ourselves before God and repent to experience God’s kingdom now and forever. Faith is courage, to be honest with ourselves before and with God. May God’s kingdom come and dwell in you now and forever.