

MARK — Two Kingdoms & the Fear of Man

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Mark began his Gospel with a sort of thesis statement that captures what his Gospel is about: “*The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God...*” Meaning that Mark’s entire work is meant to be telling us about the beginning of the Good News of Jesus.

In light of that, a helpful question I’ve been using to study through Mark is whenever I’m reading, to ask, “*how does this section or chapter tell me about the beginning of the Good News of Jesus?*” This is helpful because it allows us to use scripture to interpret itself.



We may lack a lot of the cultural context, but this is a great first principle in helping us grasp what is going on in the narrative, and why Mark structured his Gospel this way.

Mark 6:6b-29

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits.

These 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.”

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

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!”

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 had 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.

Finally the opportune time came. On his birthday Herod gave a banquet for his high officials and 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 my kingdom.”

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 in 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 the prison, and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother.

On hearing of this, John’s disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

The New International Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Mk 6:6–29

The Kingdom of God Advances

In verses 6 - 12, we see a description of the Kingdom of Jesus taking off!

His disciples are deputized to go and heal and cast out demons and bring life to whom they found would accept them and their instructions are to take nothing extra with them for the journey, and to only go where they will be accepted.

If they are rejected, they are to move on. But many people accepted them, and the deputized disciples start building the kingdom: Life, healing, and freedom. They’re doing

exactly what Jesus has been doing in chapters 1 - 5! **But these ordinary humans are able to accomplish the wonders of God.**

Recall Mark Chapter 4, the parable of the mustard seed. The disciples are small, not as educated, and insignificant. And yet they are creating spaces where people are finding shelter and life. Their obedience is advancing Jesus' kingdom.



Jesus can delegate his authority to inadequate humans and their obedience can bring forth life. This is a glimpse of humans ruling out of their Genesis 1 original design: stewarding the earth with God's wisdom to be a blessing to all of creation.

News Spreads

So news of this amazing work begins to spread, and eventually makes its way up the grapevine to the political elite and now they're trying to figure out who this guy is. One salient character in particular, Herod, hears about this and asserts that this man leading this miracle ministry is John, whom he beheaded!

Mark shows how Jesus' kingdom is misunderstood.

Mark has been diligent to show us that every word or action by Jesus & company is frequently met with mixed reactions and confusion. His own family rejects him. The religious elite plot to kill him because they don't see who he is. A few people accept him, but again, Jesus' kingdom seems insignificant and misunderstood.

Two Kings

King #1

The first picture of juxtaposition is Jesus' kingdom. No throne, no extra clothes for the road, no extra food, but the reliance on community and on God's spirit to bring life out of death and light out of darkness.

The Kingdom of Heaven spreads life. In Jesus' kingdom, there is no force or violence. He goes everywhere he is welcomed.

King #2

But in Herod's kingdom, Mark shows that despite the façade of wealth and excess and riches and privilege, there is confusion, fear, anxiety, mistrust, injustice, and death. Mark is painting a picture of two kings and their two Kingdoms.

King Herod's Netflix Drama

So, Herod Antipas (son of Herod the baby slayer), one of the provincial rulers of Roman occupied Israel-Palestine, married the princess of Nabatea. Nabatea was an Arabian Super Wealthy Mercantile Network whose biggest city you might recognize as carved into a mountain (Petra).

After 20 years of marriage, he spent some time with his brother Herod Philip and his wife Herodias. During that time, he fell in love with his brother's wife, and proposed to her. She accepted –but on the condition that he divorce the princess of Nabatea.

And John the baptist was caught up in all of this. He knew what was going on and decided he was going to preach truth and call Antipas to account. And despite Herod's rashness and lust, he was intrigued by John's message and liked listening to truth. Oh but Herodias? No. She wanted him dead. Why? It was clear that the truth was not well received by her - perhaps because it exposed her sin.

And this is where Mark's text is clear about Herodias: she seized her opportunity on Herod's birthday, where she took advantage of her husband's rash nature (which may have been aided by alcohol at the time), and his fear of man and works against him to murder the man he respected.

And while one loved listening to the truth and other hated it, both, in their rashness and fear of man, killed the truth speaker, demonstrating that hearing the truth and obeying the truth are not the same.

And to bring some closure, beyond Mark's gospel, this whole situation didn't go over well with the King of Nabatea, naturally, and so prepares his army for war. This also didn't go over well with Philip.

So in the background of Mark's story, are two armies preparing for war, and fighting it out because of one king's lust. Josephus records that "*all Herod's army was destroyed by the treachery of some fugitives, who, though they were of the tetrarchy of Philip, joined with [the King of Nabatea's army].*" (Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 484.)

And Josephus adds near the end of his account, "

Now the Jews had an opinion that the destruction of this army was sent as a punishment upon Herod, and a mark of God's displeasure against him." (Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), 484.)



True Authority

And so, I ask you, what is the Kingdom of Herod like – Or we could ask what is the kingdom of Humanity like?

How did Herod Antipas use his authority?

Was it to bring blessing and life to all nations, or try to kill them? Did Antipas even have authority, or was he captured by his rash tongue and the fear of his own subjects?

How does this compare to Jesus' authority? How does Jesus use his words?

In Jesus' kingdom, when he deputizes you, you will have authority to heal, bring life, and cast out demons. You will have the delegated authority to preach truth to people, and if you die for doing that, it will be for bringing blessing and truth.

But in Herod's kingdom, when he deputizes you, you will fight and die on behalf of a foolish king that makes rash oaths and broken marriages.

In Jesus' kingdom, you serve a king that wants to bless the nations.

In Herod's kingdom, he doesn't care for the nations - only what advances his interests.

In Jesus' kingdom, you might start out as a mustard seed; maybe even for a long time. You will be disregarded, lack honor, and seem insignificant. But your obedience to the King is what's going to transform your neighborhood and school and city.

In Herod's kingdom, your loyalty might bring you all of the titles, the status, the parties, the fancy gifts, the job that you want, but you will be ineffective and irrelevant to actually being a force of blessing for this world. And ultimately, you will die - not for anything great, but you will die enslaved to the fear of man, in the name of advancing a kingdom that seeks to destroy King Jesus.

You see, this kingdom destroyed the prophet who prepared the way for Jesus. And this foreshadowing pulls back the curtain on the kingdom that seeks destruction of the King of Life.



These two Kings are opposed to each other, and it matters who you serve, because both claim to have ultimate authority, but only one has the true authority.

The Fear of Man is a Terrible Leader

That's because the authority of humans in the hands of kings is just as fragile as in the hands of servants. We are all subject to the **fear of what people think of us**, subject to being hangry or emotionally unstable, fickle, vacillating between kindness and cruelty to those around us.



If our loyalty doesn't lie in some president or prime minister, or party, our loyalty is to ourselves. And neither the president nor you are a great leader when relying on unstable human wisdom.

And thus, Mark makes the case that your life is best invested in a kingdom that isn't flashy, but has healing, deliverance, life, and freedom all day everyday.

He doesn't shy away from the reality that yes, **you may die (or be punished) for speaking the truth**, but Jesus is a far worthier cause than the empty gods of wealth and status, that come and go with the wind.

And it's ironic that I'm far less afraid of someone killing me for preaching the gospel, and paralyzed by what someone thinks of me for doing that. I'm too scared sometimes to be the one to bring blessing or speak truth.

But that fear of people is a snare, and I do not win that battle all the time. I must constantly repent for giving into fear and listening to shame and every day – and ask the Holy Spirit for wisdom for when to speak and what to speak, and boldness.

When I do that, I'm able to bless people with truth, and be like that mustard seed.

But if I don't, I end up entrusting myself to humans & their corruption & what they think rather than to Jesus.

Fear of Man or Fear of God?

And with that in mind, I lay before you the question of where you want to swear your loyalty: Is your loyalty to humans - to yourself, or to King Jesus?

Humans will talk and say things, promising that your original design is fulfilled by serving their interests or by chasing wealth or status or impressing others...

...but ultimately serving that kingdom results in the trap of the **fear of man**, the trap which even Kings are powerless to escape.

Every day you sit at a tree of decision – you get to choose to either be the tree of life or the tree of human wisdom. You have the opportunity to bring blessing, do nothing, or take blessing away.

And each opportunity is a chance to acquiesce your kingship to Jesus and let him delegate his authority to you – Not enslaved to the fear of man, but the fear of the Lord, which is true wisdom.

Every day you'll have more opportunities to repent and ask the Holy Spirit for boldness and wisdom in what to say and do.

Every day, you get to pray this prayer as we close:

"Jesus, I repent for letting the fear of people control my obedience. I don't want to be enslaved to the fear of man and try to serve two masters - please be the King of my life. Give me the fear of the Lord, wisdom for what to say and do, and when to do that.

"Help me to obey your truth; even in my inadequacies, my obedience can bring forth life.

"Who do you want me to speak your truth to? Who do you want me to bless?"

"Give me boldness to obey you, and to be a blessing to those whom you called me to serve. Empower me to represent you well and to be sensitive to you, Holy Spirit."