JESUS SENDS OUT THE TWELVE

Mark 6:1–29

Key Verse: 6:12

“They went out and preached that people should repent.”

Have you ever worried about how people would react if you told them something honestly? Most of us are very uncomfortable with conflict. And yet as we look at Jesus’ life and ministry, we see that conflict followed him everywhere. Today’s passage is structured kind of like a sandwich. Verses 1–6 and 14–29 are like the two pieces of bread, and verses 7–13 are like the meat. What ties it all together is how people respond to Jesus and his message. Jesus knew there’d be a negative response. Still, he sends out the Twelve to tell people the good news. In doing this Jesus is training these men to take on his ministry after he’s gone. Through this Bible study may God inspire us with the faith and spirit of Jesus to share God’s message with people in our time.

At this point in his ministry Jesus has just done some incredible miracles. He calmed the stormy Sea of Galilee. He drove thousands of demons out of a man. He healed a woman with chronic bleeding, and even raised a twelve-year-old girl back to life. But when he goes to his hometown of Nazareth, we see a sharp contrast. Look at verses 1,2. Jesus went to his hometown not just to see his family, but on an official visit, with his Twelve disciples. When he arrived, he focused on sharing God’s word with everybody. Mark doesn’t say exactly what Jesus was teaching. But wherever he went, Jesus was proclaiming that the kingdom of God had come near, and he was urging people to repent and believe the good news (1:15). He was planting the living hope of God’s kingdom in people’s hearts. Just as when he first started teaching in Capernaum, when they heard him, people were amazed. Nobody ever spoke about the Bible the way Jesus did, with such profound wisdom. Plus, his hometown people had all heard about the amazing miracles he’d been performing elsewhere.

But then their human thinking began to take over. Look at verse 3. These hometown people began to despise Jesus because they knew his human background. Jesus grew up among them working as a carpenter, a common laborer. They called him “son of Mary” instead of Joseph, insinuating that he was an illegitimate son. All his brothers and sisters were nothing special. When they thought like this, the hometown people’s amazement quickly turned to offense. They thought Jesus was not qualified to teach them anything. Look at verse 4. Jesus is quoting a famous proverb. In history, prophets never gained the respect of their hometown people and families. It’s because these people always saw them from a human point of view. Look at verse 5. Jesus could do anything with his power. But he chose not to work in an environment in which people were so unbelieving. Look at verse 6a. Jesus usually wasn’t amazed by anything. But in this case, he was amazed at the lack of faith in the very people who should have known and believed in him the most.

So why did Jesus lead his disciples to his hometown to witness this? It was to help them prepare for what they would likely experience in the future. When the disciples accepted the mission Jesus gave them and began to work for God’s kingdom, the people who knew them best would not be supportive of them, either. It’s still true today. For God to work in any community, people need to see things with the eyes of faith.

It was personally discouraging, but Jesus wasn’t at all daunted. Look at verse 6b. Jesus overcame his personal feelings and pressed on with the work God had called him to do (1:38,39). He kept on spreading the good news of the kingdom. Read verse 7. This is even more surprising. Not only was he not discouraged by his hometown people; he was determined to do the will of God all the more. We saw back in chapter 3 that this is exactly why he first called these twelve men (3:14,15). He called them to do the work he himself was doing. Now, after observing Jesus for some time, he sends them out, ready or not. We learn some important principles here.

**First**, Jesus sends them out two by two. Read verse 7 again. This was partly to help people believe, based on the testimony of not one, but two witnesses. But it also was to encourage his disciples to help each other. Ministry is never a one-person show; it always requires co-working. Where there is real co-working, God works greatly. Where people are working all by themselves, usually it’s for personal glory, and so God doesn’t bless it.

**Second**, Jesus gives authority over impure spirits. Read verse 7 once more. Jesus knew he was sending his disciples not to do volunteer social work, but into an intense spiritual battle. Their struggle would be not really with people, but with the devil and his agents, impure spirits. His disciples were still young and weak in many ways. But Jesus gave them his own authority over impure spirits. He was empowering them to drive out the impure spirits from people’s lives. They could do such an amazing thing when they simply depended on Jesus, not on themselves. The same is true for us. We don’t have anything special in ourselves to take credit for, but if we simply depend on Jesus, he can use us to bring people real spiritual healing.

**Third**, Jesus taught to depend on God for material provisions. Read verses 8,9. With these instructions Jesus was teaching his disciples not just to travel light, but to depend on the hospitality of people. It was so that they could totally focus on doing the work he’d sent them to do. It was another dimension of depending on God, this time not for spiritual power to help people, but for material needs. It still tells us today that we don’t need money to do God’s work; we just need faith to depend on God.

**Fourth**, Jesus taught to work with people who are open-hearted. Read verses 10,11. Jesus didn’t want them to move around from house to house to try to find better accommodations. He wanted them to work with the people who opened their hearts and homes to them. He also taught them to be very clear with people who were not open. Read verse 11 again. This is what Jews of that time used to do when they happened to travel through a Gentile town; now Jesus is telling his disciples to do it to people who would not accept those who served in his name. It would have been such a blessing to have Jesus’ disciples stay at one’s house. Those who did not value that blessing would lose it, and along with it, they’d lose the blessing of learning about God’s kingdom.

So what did the Twelve do? Read verse 12. In his instructions we don’t find any place where Jesus literally said to tell people to repent. But surely it’s what the disciples had heard Jesus doing (1:15). It’s also what they themselves had done; they had many weaknesses, but these men basically had repented and started following Jesus. Verse 12 shows that their preaching wasn’t theoretical and abstract, but got right down to business. They simply told people they needed to repent. They believed everybody, young and old, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, needs to repent, so they said it to everyone.

What does it mean to repent? Essentially it means to turn around. In this case, it means to turn away from self and from pursuing the world and turn toward pursuing God. It’s still hard today to tell people to repent. When they hear it, people can get really mad. But it’s not a condemning message; it’s a life-giving message. It’s a message of hope, telling people that if they turn back to God, God will pour out his grace of forgiveness on them and welcome them into his kingdom. Even though it seems scary, to help people spiritually, we need to help them to repent. For our own spiritual health, we too need to sincerely repent, not before people but before God.

What happened when the disciples followed instructions and gave people this message from Jesus? Look at verse 13. God worked powerfully through them. Many demons were driven out. Many sick people were healed. May God grant us the courage to give people the message of Jesus, so that they can really experience the kingdom of God.

The last part of today’s passage tells the story of Herod and John the Baptist. It describes the time in which Jesus and his disciples ministered. It was a dark time. Look at verses 14–16. King Herod heard about the powerful ministry of Jesus and his disciples. After killing John the Baptist, Herod was so haunted by his guilty conscience that when he heard about Jesus and his disciples, he thought John had been raised from the dead. In those times, a wicked king like Herod could murder a righteous man like John and no one could say anything.

Mark goes into great detail to tell us how it happened. It’s not just an interesting story; it shows what happens when people reject the message of repentance. Herod feared John the Baptist and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. He didn’t fully understand him, but he liked to listen to him. However, his wife Herodias was controlling him. And she got really mad because John the Baptist had publicly rebuked the two of them for being married, when in fact she had been married to Herod’s brother, who was still alive. Herodias was an ambitious, power-hungry woman who would never listen to a man like John the Baptist. In fact, she wanted him killed. To make her happy, Herod had arrested John and had him bound and put in prison. But that was not enough for Herodias. Finally, she got her chance. It was at Herod’s birthday party. Herod’s high officials, military commanders and the leading men of Galilee were there. Everybody no doubt was drinking hard. Then Herodias sent her daughter in to dance for the king. It was probably a lecherous dance. Herod in his drunken state was so excited he promised on oath to give her anything. When the girl went to ask what to ask for, her mom said, “The head of John the Baptist.” This time Herod was caught. He never intended to do such a wicked thing. But when he didn’t take the message of repentance seriously, the devil eventually got a hold of him.

Today we learned that in the midst of rejection Jesus trained his disciples to be workers for God’s kingdom. They were to live simply, depending on God, and give people a simple message, that they needed to repent. When they depended on Jesus’ instructions and the authority he gave them, God used them greatly. We also learned the importance of really accepting this message of repentance. May God help us to repent whatever it may be in our lives that we may need to repent of. And may he help us encourage people to repent and believe the good news, so that they can experience God’s gracious kingdom.