

Where Jesus Goes, Peace Follows

SCOTT HOEZEE

Some years ago, I heard a Bible scholar say that we could think of the Bible like a piano keyboard, with the words in the Bible being like the piano's keys; but if so, words in the Bible seldom sound just a single note, as would happen if you played the key for middle C. No; words in the Bible always form chords with other parts of the Bible. You play not just middle C, but a whole chord of other notes to accompany it from elsewhere on the keyboard. In Mark 6, we read a famous story about Jesus feeding a great crowd, but as we dig into this story today on *Groundwork*, we will find corresponding chords being played all over the place in the Bible. Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are now on program number four of a six-part series on the Gospel of Mark; and as we have said before, Mark is the shortest of the four gospels, but it is still hard to cover a whole gospel, even in a six-part series. So, what we have been doing is picking up on some key themes and patterns that are in Mark; and today, we are going to really pick up on a very important story from Mark 6; and as we do that today, we are going to see that a lot of those different themes in Mark, including what we have been saying is sort of the core question of Mark, answering the question: Who is Jesus? A big part of Jesus' identity is going to get disclosed to us in Mark 6 in the feeding of the five thousand.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; we will also refer to several of the surrounding stories in Mark 6; so, that is really going to be our focus today—this great chapter; and again, just to recap: Jesus is spending his time in Galilee. Most of his ministry is unfolding there, and the things that he has said and done—the miracles that he has performed—as well as the amazing teaching...he taught with authority, Mark says; and it got people to sit up and take notice, because he was kind of like Moses in that respect; and unlike the rabbis, who would always cite some older rabbi as their authority, Jesus said it direct from God. In that way, he has attracted a huge following; so much so that we often see him needing to kind of retreat and get away and find some place to recharge his batteries because of the demands that are being placed on him by the crowds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Mark is a dramatic gospel. We said Jesus' ministry took off like a rocket—like a Roman candle—and so, right, he has attracted a huge amount of attention by his teachings—his miracles—the casting out of demons—and that will kind of bring us to that sixth chapter...the feeding of the five thousand. By the way, we sometimes forget this, but there are only just a couple...three...maybe four or so stories that are included in all four gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

John has a lot of stuff found nowhere else, and he doesn't repeat too much that Matthew, Mark and Luke already told; but not this one. The feeding of the five thousand is in all of the gospels, telling us it really is a significant event...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Mark has his own way...

Dave Bast: The only miracle story, I think, that is in all four gospels.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, quite amazing; but Mark sets it up kind of interestingly. So, just into Chapter 6, Jesus sends the disciples out on their first ever solo ministry tour, and they do great things; and they come back, and they are happy; and Jesus is happy; but then, in the midst of all that, Mark inserts something interesting here in Chapter 6.

DAVE BAST

Here is what he writes: ¹⁴King 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. ¹⁵Other said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." ¹⁶But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

SCOTT HOEZEE

Now, what we have to do...which, for many of us anyway, is hard to do...you have to kind of pretend you are reading the Gospel of Mark for the first time...

DAVE BAST

And you don't know any of the other gospels either...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

Because Mark is the first...it is the earliest.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, if you are reading Mark along...you started at Chapter 1, and now you are bumping along and you are in what we now call Chapter 6, and all of a sudden, King Herod says: Oh, well; Jesus? That is John the Baptist back from the dead. If you were reading this for the first time, you would say: Hold it...hold it...hold it. Dead? John the Baptist is dead?! I didn't even know he was sick!

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

What do you mean, he is dead? Because we haven't been told that story yet; and yet, Mark kind of plunks it in here, and then he backfills it.

DAVE BAST

Right; and so, he goes on to tell the sordid tale of John's demise. Herod had arrested John because John offended him by calling out his sin. Herod had seduced and married his own sister-in-law; and the story of Salomé and the banquet and Herod's wife's daughter, who was also, then, his niece—his brother's

child—dances in this sort of seductive way, and he is probably drunk, and he says: I'll give you anything you want; and she says, prompted by her mother: Well, give me the head of John the Baptist; and Herod is chagrined, but he goes through with it rather than the embarrassment of not keeping his promise.

SCOTT HOEZEE

John the Baptist was the last great Old Testament prophet, and the first great New Testament herald, and yet, he dies in such a tawdry way. They just lop off his head because of this boozy offer that Herod makes to this young girl: You want the moon, Honey? I'll give you the moon! I'll take John the Baptist's head. Well, end of John. But for our purposes, Dave, in this program, Mark is telling this out of order. This is not *when* John the Baptist died...at this particular moment in the narrative of Jesus...it had happened some time before. So, what effect does it have that Mark is inserting it at this particular moment?

DAVE BAST

That is the question: Why? Why does Mark put it here, and what is he trying to do?

SCOTT HOEZEE

What it does, I think...and what I think we can recognize...what it does is, it introduces sort of a darkening element...sort of a sad element. There is an overtone of death all of a sudden here. We are reminded in a vivid way of why our world is broken; why Jesus had to come to save this world...this terrible, almost silly demise of this important man, John the Baptist; what a reminder of our sinfulness, and why we need a savior. That is all true; but it does darken the picture here; and given what is going to happen, and what we are going to say the meaning of it is, I think that is probably pretty significant.

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely; there is some foreshadowing going on in this whole story. I mean, you maybe noticed the confusion about who Jesus is. In an earlier program, we talked about misunderstanding and rejection...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that is going to come back when Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Because there are all of these suggestions as to his identity: Well, maybe he is John the Baptist come back from the dead; or maybe he is Elijah returned from heaven; or he is a prophet like Isaiah or Jeremiah. So, that is going on here. John's fate...the death that befalls him as a righteous man...that is going to throw a shadow that will lengthen through to the very end, when Jesus, of course, goes to the cross in darkness. So, we can see the tone-setting here of why Mark would introduce this jarring note of the death of John the Baptist.

In this context, then, Jesus does something rather interesting. He will take his disciples, round them up, and head off into the desert, across the Sea of Galilee, and the crowd will follow him there; and that is the story that we want to turn to in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, let's get right back to Mark Chapter 6. We have seen the setup...the sad news that Mark inserts here about the death of John the Baptist; and then we read this:

³⁰The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹Then, because so many people were coming and going that they didn't even have a chance to eat, Jesus said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." ³²So, they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.

DAVE BAST

³³But many who saw them leaving recognized them, and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴When 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. ³⁵By this time, it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it is already very late. ³⁶Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, Jesus and his disciples kind of needed a breather, but they are not going to get one. Again, Jesus has become so famous that he just is hounded by the crowds; but, what we want to see here, Dave, is something that you are going to miss in almost every single translation of the Bible. So, we have already noted that there is a little bit of a shadow over this chapter because of the report of John the Baptist's death; but then, three times Mark uses the same word. It is the word *eremos*, which means wilderness or desert-like; but it keeps getting translated differently. So, in verse 31, they went to a *quiet* place; verse 32, they went to a *solitary* place; verse 35, the disciples wanted to get rid of the crowds because they were in a *remote* place. So, solitary, quiet, remote...but in Greek, it is all *eremos*, and it all means a desert place.

DAVE BAST

Yes...the same word...

SCOTT HOEZEE

A wilderness place.

DAVE BAST

The same word; and actually, that is the word from which we get the word *hermit*, because the first monks...the very earliest of the so-called desert fathers, were Christians who went out into the desert...the Egyptian desert and the Judean desert...to kind of live lone, solitary lives as hermits, they came to be called, because this was a place of great power and meaning to them; and it is a place of great power and meaning...not necessarily positive, either...for Jesus; and it makes me think of that sort of image, Scott, that you used in the intro about the piano. You hear a chord, and you even hear overtones on the chords of a piano; and this word echoes back into other parts of scripture, doesn't it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; the wilderness for the Israelites of old, the wilderness in the prophets and in the psalms...the wilderness is a place of death; and there is a reason the disciples say: You have got to get them out of here; because there is never anything to eat in the wilderness, or drink. It is a place of death. We saw in the first program in this series that of course, no sooner was Jesus baptized than the Spirit hurled him...impelled him straight into the wilderness...because the wilderness is a sign of this world's fallenness and death. So, that is very important...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But, let's continue to read. So, the disciples say: Oh, send the people away; but Jesus answered: ³⁷"You give them something to eat." And the disciples said to him, "That would take more than half a year's wages. Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give them to eat?" ³⁸"How many loaves do you have?" Jesus asked. "Go and see." And when they found out, they said, "Five, and two fish."

DAVE BAST

³⁹Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰So, they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹Taking 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 distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴²They all ate and were satisfied. ⁴³And the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish, ⁴⁴and the number of the men who had eaten was five thousand. So, Jesus...here they are in this desert place...wilderness. There is no food...and by the way, if you have ever watched one of those survival shows, that is the thing that really comes through...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

There is nothing to eat in the woods of any substance; and Jesus says this curious thing. He says to the disciples: Well, you give them something to eat; and they are kind of stunned. What do you mean? Where are we going to get the money to feed these people?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; they kind of do the math and figure it is impossible, which, humanly speaking, it would have been impossible. They didn't have a half-year's wages, I am sure; and they would have cleaned out all the local markets, even if they could have found any; but, Mark is this marvelous writer, Dave, and we have been saying from the beginning, Mark says a lot with a little. I mean, he is the briefest writer in the New Testament, and he says a lot with a little, but you have to look carefully at the words he uses; and again, they are not sounding a single note on the keyboard of the Bible; they are forming chords with other parts. So, let's note a couple of things that he says here, Dave. The first one is that innocent looking little word in verse 39, where Jesus has the people sit down in groups. Now, what is interesting about that is, that is the Greek word *symposia*; we get our word *symposium* from it. It is the only place in the whole Bible where you find this word; and what was a *symposia* in Greek? It was a party. It was a festive gathering of people. Think of a summertime picnic, you know...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where you've got corn on the cob and hotdogs and beans and coleslaw and all the rest; and so, these little groups that Jesus has them sit down in are not just silent little gatherings of somber people. There was joy here. That is the first thing that is interesting.

DAVE BAST

Yes, kind of a party atmosphere.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the wilderness, again; which is why the next part is important.

DAVE BAST

Right; Jesus says to the disciples, not just: Gather these people into groups, which they did. They sort of sorted this huge crowd out; but he said: Sit them down there on the green grass; and one of the things that is striking about scripture is, it almost never mentions colors...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, why does Mark specifically say the grass is green (on this side of the fence) and it is green in the wilderness...where do you get green grass in the desert? It doesn't even kind of make sense, unless you are listening for those biblical allusions and connections.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Almost anybody who knows the Bible reasonably well, listening to this, might already be making that connection in their mind. It is Psalm 23: He makes me to lie down in green pastures, and he restores my soul. Jesus...he already saw the people and had compassion, because they seemed like sheep without a shepherd; and now we are brought to Psalm 23, to the green grass. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep.

DAVE BAST

A lot of times you will hear this miracle taught or preached, and you will hear something to the effect that: Well, it is a story about what Jesus can do with what little you have. Here is this young boy—we learn that from another of the gospels—who has got his lunch with him...five loaves and two fish...if you just offer up to Jesus your little, he can multiply it. That's nice...that's good...but that is not really what Mark is getting at here, I don't think, is it? I think he is zeroing in...he is cueing us in to Jesus' true identity.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The prophets all said it over and over in the Old Testament. You can read about it in the psalms and elsewhere, that when the Messiah comes, the desert is going to bloom, the desert is going to become an oasis; God is going to lay out a banquet table of great things to eat...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In the wilderness. Jesus is being revealed for those with eyes to see...and we are going to see in just a moment, the disciples don't have those eyes...but for those with eyes to see, Jesus is being revealed as the Messiah...as the fulfillment of all prophecy. He brings life where there is death; just as in Chapter 1, when Jesus goes to the desert and shalom breaks out, so here, where Jesus goes, shalom follows.

DAVE BAST

So, the question is: Do we have eyes to see this, as Mark's readers? Do we understand, really, and respond appropriately to Jesus' identity? And we will consider that with one more story from this remarkable chapter, Mark 6, in just a moment.

Segment 3

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, and this fourth program of a six-part series on the Gospel of Mark, today centering on Mark Chapter 6; and Dave, we just saw that by turning a wilderness of death into an oasis of abundant life, Jesus is the great shepherd of his people. That is the revelation; but, let's notice what happens next in Mark 6.

DAVE BAST

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida...just remember, we are by the shores of the Sea of Galilee...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We call it a sea, it is really just a big lake, which is why the crowd could kind of run around the edge and beat them there when they were in this boat. Now Jesus wants to have a little time alone, and we assume it is to kind of pray by himself, as was his custom. So, he sends his disciples off in the boat, and he dismisses the crowd. ^{46b}After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn, he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified.

SCOTT HOEZEE

^{50b}Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage; it is I. Do not be afraid.” ⁵¹Then he climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down. They were completely amazed... ⁵²For they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

That is a bit of a judgment on the disciples there.

DAVE BAST

Yes, but again, notice Mark’s artistry. He commands the wind and the waves. He walks on the water. The wind dies down as he gets into the boat. It is an echo, of course, of a famous story in Mark 4...at the end of Mark 4...where Jesus is with the disciples in the boat from the beginning, and he silences the storm, as they are afraid that they are going to swamp and drown. They are just stunned, and they ask on that occasion: What sort of man is this that even the wind and the waves obey him? And that is the point. What sort of man is this? More than a man.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And yet, Mark indicates, they should not have been that amazed, because by now...partly because of what happened in Mark 4 with the other calming of the storm, that you just mentioned, but mainly because of what just happened with the loaves...they shouldn’t have been amazed. They should have been getting it by now, that of course Jesus can do this. He is the Son of God; but their hearts were hardened.

You know, the preacher and the teacher of preaching, Tom Long, has often pointed out that one of the differences between Matthew’s Gospel and Mark’s Gospel is that in Matthew, Matthew likes to give the disciples a little more credit for understanding, and they often come off a little bit better; whereas, Mark just sort of says: Nah, they were pretty well clueless all along. But, the fact that here their hearts were hardened. I mean, you think about Pharaoh in the book of Exodus...

DAVE BAST

Sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Hard hearts are never a good thing. So, what exactly were they supposed to have understood from the loaves? Well, it is what we just said: Of course Jesus can do this. He is the Great Shepherd of the sheep—he is Messiah.

DAVE BAST

One of our themes in one of these programs is the Messianic secret—the fact that Jesus’ identity was really withheld, and intentionally so, by himself, because people had the wrong idea. They didn’t really get what kind of a Messiah he was going to be, but he was more than the Messiah, too...more than just a national champion...and there is another little tidbit here in Mark, with his artistry, that you could skip if you didn’t understand it. ^{v50b}“Take courage,” (Jesus says to them when they are panicky in the boat) “It is I. Don’t be afraid.” And that “It is I” in Greek is *eg? einai*. It is the same formulation that John will use again and again—Jesus in John will use the “I am” sayings, and echoing behind that is the Old Testament name of God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Great I Am.

DAVE BAST

The Great I Am, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yahweh.

DAVE BAST

That is who he is, and that is why they shouldn't be afraid; but, they don't see it. Not yet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is easy to be hard on the disciples. It is easy to say, oh yeah, their hearts were hardened; they were clueless; but, you know, I think one of the things Mark does all the time is swivel the camera back to us as readers to say: Well, okay, but what about you? Do you always get Jesus right? Do we realize that as long as Jesus is in the boat with us...and let's think of the boat as being almost a symbol of the Church...we are going to be okay. We are not going to finally perish, because Jesus is with us; and the question I think that we have today... So, this story began in the wilderness, which we said was a place of death made more shadowy by news of John the Baptist's death that Mark inserted earlier in Mark 6; and yet, in that place of death, Jesus brought life in a dangerous situation on the sea right after that, Jesus preserved life; and I think, Dave, we all find ourselves in wilderness times. The Church as a whole can find itself in wilderness times. You know, the news is often filled...in fact, as we record this, the news was recently filled on an Easter Sunday of churches in Sri Lanka that were bombed, and people who came to worship the risen Jesus were killed in church. The Church finds itself...the believers of God find themselves in places of death and wilderness, but we are reminded Jesus is with us; he is the Great Shepherd of the sheep; we are still sorrowful at times, but take courage: It is I.

DAVE BAST

Yes; anyone who has ever been in an ICU waiting room, anyone who has ever gone to the cemetery for a committal, we know what it is like to be in places of death; and the Lord doesn't promise that we won't have to go there. What he does promise is that he will be there with us...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And that he will bring his life. Take courage, as you said, Scott. You just quoted that word of Jesus again: It is I. Don't be afraid, he adds. I remember reading somewhere some time ago that don't be afraid is the most often repeated command in all of the Bible. Don't be afraid. That is what God says to us, and because Jesus is who he said he was, and did what he claimed to do, we can believe him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so, Jesus' feeding of the five thousand...it turns out it is not a story from long ago and far away, and a story that is only about other people. It turns out that this is our story right now today; and hopefully, unlike the disciples, we don't want to miss out on understanding who our Savior is. He is here revealed as full of love and grace; he is full of life abundance, particularly in places of death; and he will stay with us forevermore.

DAVE BAST

Amen. Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we hope you will join us again next time as we welcome once more Dr. Gary Burge to continue our study of Mark's Gospel by examining Jesus' parables.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear us discuss on *Groundwork*.

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