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**Grace Evangelical Church**  
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**"Challenges In Following Jesus"**  
**Mark 6**

A football coach gave this advice on how to deal with failures. "When you're about to be run out of town, get out in front and make it look like you're heading a parade."

Thomas Edison's manufacturing facilities in West Orange, N.J., were heavily damaged by fire one night in December, 1914. Edison lost almost \$1 million worth of equipment and the record of much of his work. The next morning, walking about the charred embers of his hopes and dreams, the 67-year-old inventor said: "There is value in disaster. All our mistakes are burned up. Now we can start anew."

Yes life has failures. Life has decisions we must make. There are challenges physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Someone has said there are five things we all face in life at different times, the loss of security, the fear of criticism, the loss of love, perhaps some illness, aging, and then death. Of course we can add to that taxes.

How does Jesus help us in our many challenges in life that we face in our lives at different times, when we even may feel like throwing in the towel in certain circumstances?

The actions of Jesus in Mark 6 have some helpful answers for us.

**I. In our challenges Jesus wants us to keep trusting in Him (Mark 6:1-6).**

Jesus was ministering in Nazareth His hometown (some 20 miles south of Capernaum) where he spent some 30 years of his life as He grew up in the home of His foster father Joseph, a carpenter, and his mother Mary. Jesus would have been well known in that small village. You would have thought Jesus would have been received with open arms. The "home town boy" is coming home. In fact, this is the second time that Jesus had come to Nazareth, as His first visit is given by Dr. Luke in Luke 4:14-29, where after his teaching they drove Him out of the city. Now how would Jesus be received in His second visit to Nazareth?

**1. The reception Jesus received in Nazareth (6:1-3).**

**(1) They liked Jesus' teaching and works.**

Jesus reputation had gone before Him, and He was permitted to teach in the synagogue on the Sabbath day. The people are astonished at Jesus' wisdom, His teaching, and His works, evidently what they had heard He had done for He did no significant ministry there.

**(2) They had questions about who Jesus was.**

At the same time the people have questions about this "hometown boy." (Mark 6:3). Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary. He is just the son of Mary, perhaps illegitimate, as it was unusual to refer to someone as the son of their mother in ancient Jewish times. It may have been known that Mary had become pregnant before her marriage to Joseph (Matthew 1:18-25). In fact in ancient Jewish tradition, Jesus is referred to as an illegitimate child. Luke, of course, tells us otherwise (Luke 1:26-38). Jesus also had other half brothers and sisters in Nazareth as our text in Mark 6:3 tells us (cf. Matthew 13:55-56).

There are still questions about who Jesus is today? His humanity is accepted by most. He was a carpenter like He was accepted in His hometown. But Jesus' deity is categorically denied by the cults and world religions today. Times have not changed. Who is this Jesus? To the unbelieving mind, He can't be God.

**(3) They rejected who Jesus was.**

**Note the words in Mark 6:3 – "They took offense at Him."**

This literally means that they "stumbled over Christ." As other Scriptures tell us that Jesus was the "stone of stumbling" (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:32-33; I Peter 2:8).

As one commentator says, "They could not explain Him, so they rejected Him."

Jesus' wonderful teaching and works they had heard about did not cause them to accept Jesus as their Messiah and Savior. Instead they rejected Jesus for who He was – truly the God-man, their Savior and God.

## **2. The response Jesus gave to His rejection in Nazareth (6:4-6).**

### **(1) Jesus' words (6:4).**

Jesus was quick to point to the people as He did in Luke 4 that a "prophet is not without honor except in his hometown among his own relatives and in his own household."

### **(2) Jesus' action (6:5).**

He had no significant ministry there, although He healed a few people, for there was a little faith exercised by a few. But the overwhelming response to Christ was unbelief to who Jesus was so His ministry was very limited to say the least.

### **(3) Jesus' thoughts (6:6).**

Jesus wondered or marveled at their unbelief. In other place, Luke 7:9, Jesus marveled at the faith on the Roman centurion, a Gentile. Interesting contrast between the Jews unbelief and the Gentile's belief in the Lord.

Jesus left Nazareth and kept on ministering.

## **3. The teaching for us here.**

But let's not miss the teaching here.

### **(1) Unbelief always hinders God's miraculous power from working in an individual's life, but faith in the Lord is what brings the believer salvation, and then spiritual growth in one's life.**

For salvation – For by grace you are saved through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9).

For daily living in our walk with Christ (II Corinthians 5:7 – our year verse) – We walk by faith not by sight.

### **(2) Note how Jesus handled rejection of His person.**

Jesus was rejected at the core of His person, being God and man. He was thought to be the illegitimate son of Mary, just a carpenter. Did that cause Christ to veer off of His mission of coming to serve and to eventually give His life a ransom for many? Did He get upset with His heavenly Father for what was happening to Him in His hometown? Did He throw in the towel and say I am a failure, and I am not going to minister any more.

Jesus knew who He was and what His mission was on earth. His faith was in His heavenly Father who sent Him into the world to show us who God is, to fulfill God's law, and to pay the penalty for breaking it in His death, burial and bodily resurrection. He did that all for us so He could provide us His eternal forgiveness and life through faith in HIM.

**How do we respond when challenges come our way when we may feel rejected, depreciated, and not appreciated? Do we start floating into unbelief? Or when real tragedy strikes do we want to throw in the towel? Some, sad to say, get angry at God and quit serving Him. Others leave the church and float into unbelief in their experience with God and others.**

But Christ challenges us through His example to keep having faith in Him and His Word, believing that He is there with us to help us through the challenge we are facing. He is urging us on "to keep the faith!" in the midst of our challenges as followers of Christ. We must not forget who we are, accepted in Christ, saints, victors in Christ, and keep focused on His mission for us to glorify Him in all that we think, do, and say. We must keep from "floating into unbelief" on a constant basis, and miss the blessing He has for us in the midst of our challenges.

**But Jesus has another desire for us as His followers.**

## **II. In our challenges Jesus wants us to rely on His authority not our authority (Mark 6:7-13).**

In Mark 3, Mark records for us Jesus calling His twelve disciples to minister with and for Him. Now in Mark 6:7-13, we have Jesus sending out His disciples in pairs to minister. Ministering in pairs was following what the law said in Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15; II Corinthians 13:1). You will notice that it says in Mark 6:7 that He gave them authority over the unclean spirits, or over the demons that they would encounter.

### **1. They were to travel lightly (6:8-9).**

They were to take only a staff, no bread, no bag (a beggar carried a bag). The disciples were not beggars. They were to take no money (Trust in the Lord to supply). The staff could be for their protection and their feet were to have sandals depicting their readiness to serve the Lord, also for protection as well. They were to trust in the Lord to provide hospitality for them as was done in that day. The lightness of their travel certainly stressed that their journey was to be carried out quickly.

### **2. The hospitality offered to them (6:10-11).**

When provided a place to stay, they were to accept it, and not go to a better place if offered later. The disciples were not to be lured by what people could provide. If a village rejected them, they were to leave and shake the dust off their sandals. This signified God's rejection of that town, a symbol of disassociation (cf. Acts 13:51). This is taken from Jewish tradition where a Jew took pains to not carry back into Palestine any dust from non-Jewish countries.

**Certainly how Jesus handled rejection in Nazareth would be a real encouragement to His disciples as they ministered.**

**To keep moving on when rejected suggests that Jesus was stressing the urgency of the task He was giving His disciples.**

### **3. Their message was one of repentance (6:12-13).**

The disciples were to tell others to turn from their sins and accept the Messiah and Savior, Jesus Christ. Their message was authenticated by the miracles that they performed in casting out demons and healing the sick.

In giving His disciples His authority to minister, Jesus was stressing **dependency** on HIM, **urgency** for their ministry (as they were to keep moving on), and continued **obedience** to Him.

Dependency, urgency, obedience were what using Christ's authority was all about.

**Paul recognized this as he served the Lord in the authority of Jesus Christ.**

**DEPENDENCY - II Corinthians 3:4-6 – We are not adequate (sufficient, have ability) in ourselves – but our adequacy (sufficiency – ability) is from God.**

**URGENCY- II Corinthians 6:12 – Now is the acceptable time. Now is the day of salvation!!**

**OBEDIENCE – Romans 6:17 – You became obedient from the heart.**

We have Christ's authority today as followers of Jesus Christ. That's why we are to be strong in the Lord and the power of His might. We are under His management – It's through using His authority in the power of the Holy Spirit that we can face our challenges and find His strength, His grace more than adequate.

**But the real issue at stake in our challenges is to rely on His authority.**

**Instead of letting Christ be on the throne of our lives, it is easy for my ego to be on the throne of my life.**

**It can happen to us as adults.** I will say what I want. I will read what I want. I will watch what I want. I don't care what I say about that person, or to that person.

It can happen to students and to children. I will do what I want. I will say what I want. I don't care what my parents think or say. I am my own boss. Jesus is dethroned from one's life. God uses one's parents to teach us about His authority so that one learns to submit to Christ's authority.

Conflict arises in the family because individuals are not submitting to Jesus Christ as the final authority.

To keep from such happening in our individual and family lives, we need to keep sensitive to the Holy Spirit who lives within us. Yes, we will sin at times in this area, but we need to be quick to confess our sin, and to ask other's forgiveness if need be. Jesus Christ is our authority in our individual lives, in our family lives, in our church life, at work, at school, and in the neighborhood.

In our relational challenges, and all of our challenges in life, Christ wants us to submit to His authority not our authority.

### **III. In our challenges Jesus wants us to be bold in His power for His glory (Mark 6:14-29).**

As the disciples began to minister in pairs in the area, the news of their message of repentance and miracles performed started circulating in the areas. In fact the ministry of the disciples was so significant that the news came to the ears of Herod (6:14).

#### **What a demonstration of their dependence on the Lord, their sense of urgency in getting out the message, and their total obedience to the Lord.**

##### **1. The thoughts of the people about the ministry of the disciples (6:14-15).**

People were saying that what the miraculous happenings were that John the Baptist had risen from the dead. Others were saying that it was Elijah, who was a prophet of miracles.

##### **2. The thoughts of Herod (the son of Herod the Great) who ruled over Galilee and Pearea (4B.C – A.D. 39).**

The term, King, here is just a popular title.

This news about possibly John the Baptist rising from the dead came to Herod. Herod kept saying, "John, whom I beheaded, has risen!" The following tells us why Herod was filled with anguish. (Mark gives more space in his writing about John the Baptist than either Matthew (14:1-12) or Luke (3:19-20; 9:7-9)).

##### **3. The actions of Herod in the past.**

Mark gives us a flashback on Herod's experience with John the Baptist. Herod had John the Baptist arrested and put in prison to silence his ministry. Why? John filled with the Lord's boldness condemned Herod's adulterous relationship with Herodias the wife of his half-brother Philip (to marry one's brother's wife was against the Law while the brother lived - Leviticus 18:16; 20:21). John was not afraid in the Spirit's power to speak out against immorality. He was courageous and bold for Jesus.

Herodias became very angry at John the Baptist and wanted to get rid of him. The time came on Herod's birthday party, when probably drunk, he asked Herodias' daughter, who came in and danced for him, what she would want from him. When she asked her mother, Herodias told her, "The head of John the Baptist on a platter." Herod is immediately saddened, or encompassed with grief (6:26 – same word to describe Jesus deeply grieved – Mark 14:34 – in the garden of Gethsemane). Still keeping his word, Herod had John the Baptist executed and his head was brought in on a platter to the girl. She gave it to her mother, Herodias. The disciples came and buried John the Baptist's body in a tomb.

**What a tragic situation!** A man of God beheaded. At the same time we see Herod seemingly fascinated by John the Baptist as he is respectful of him, yet fearful of him, but not willing to repent of his sin. Now, evidently Herod is fearful that John the Baptist had risen from the dead as the incredible message and miracles of the disciples in Jesus' authority spread through the countryside. Herod must have thought that John had come back to haunt him and pay him back for taking his life.

One writer suggests that Herod and Herodias resemble Ahab and Jezebel of the Old Testament. Ahab shook in his boots as Elijah came to him, and his wife Jezebel told him what to do, and weak-kneed Ahab followed through with the death of Naboth.

It has also been suggested that this account was intended to hint that the ministry of the disciples and Jesus would involve conflict and ultimately the death of Jesus, prefigured in John's death.

#### **4. The teaching for us today.**

Certainly this example of John the Baptist being courageous and bold in proclaiming the truth would be an inspiration to the disciples as well as an example of dependence on the Lord, urgency in getting out the message and pure obedience to His Lord.

John the Baptist was willing to stand for truth in the midst of immorality and wickedness. He was not afraid to take a stand for God's truth. Are we bold and courageous in the Lord as we face our different challenges in life? Are we will to stand for God's truth in the midst of our immoral world. Are we willing to speak up for our Lord when we have the opportunity? As different experiences come our way, are we bold in Jesus Christ to stay the course, and honor him with our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. Are we willing to obey the Lord and let the consequences take their course?

Are we will to stand for our convictions, not based upon ourselves, but upon God's Word? As Adults? As Youth? As children?

But there is one more teaching here about what Jesus desires for us as we face our different challenges.

#### **IV. In our challenges Jesus wants us to deepen and expand our trust in Him (Mark 6:30-52).**

After ministering, the disciples returned to Jesus and reported all that they had done and taught (6:30). I'm sure we would have all liked to have been there for that report and review.

As this account in this section unravels, we find that Jesus wants to get away with His disciples to a secluded place so they can have some time for refreshment. They went in a boat to a certain place, but the people saw them going away. The people arrived ahead of them and met Jesus when He went ashore.

##### **1. Jesus feeds the 5000 (Mark 6:30-44).**

**Jesus had compassion on them (that is He not just saw a need, He was also ready and willing to do something about it – the word that was used to describe the good Samaritan who ministered to the man robbed).** Due to the lateness in the day, the disciples wanted to send the people away for there was nothing to eat where they were. Jesus directed them to give the people something to eat. The disciples answered that it would take about 200 Denarii (8 months wages) to purchase bread for the number of people assembled.

Jesus asked if there was anyone there with some loaves. The disciples did some inquiring and discovered that there were 5 loaves and 2 fish. John tells us it was Andrew who found the lad with the 5 loaves and 2 fish.

Jesus directed them to sit down on the ground in groups. They sat down in groups of 100 and 50.

Jesus took the 5 loaves and 2 fish. Looking up to heaven, He blessed them, and broke the loaves and kept giving them to the disciples, dividing up the 2 fish as well. Amazing. The supply never ran out as Jesus passed out the bread and fish.

The people all ate and were satisfied. John tells us that the people didn't get the spiritual lesson here. They loved the gift but not the Giver. There were 12 baskets left over. Five thousand men (males) were fed, which means that there were probably many more individuals there with the women and children. All of the Gospel records give this miracle of Jesus. Mark refers again to it in Mark 8:19.

##### **2. Jesus walks on water (Mark 6:45-52).**

Immediately (Mark's word for moving the narrative), after the feeding of the 5000, Jesus directs His disciples to go ahead of Him by getting into a boat and sailing across the Sea of Galilee, and end their journey at the city of Bethsaida about two miles north of the Sea of Galilee. After sending His disciples away, Jesus went to a mountain to pray. What was Jesus praying for? Certainly, He was enjoying fellowship with His heavenly Father, but it also seems that He was praying for His disciples regarding deepening their faith in Him for who He was and what He could do.

**On the sea, the disciples encounter another storm (cf. Mark 4:35-41).** This time Jesus was not in the boat with them. He was on the mountain praying for them, and watching them as they struggled rowing against the wind about 3-6 AM in the morning. Seeing them struggling, Jesus came to them wading on the water. He intended to pass them by, but when they saw Him they thought they saw a ghost. I understand that the ancients regarded the sea as inhabited by sea demons, perhaps this was intended here. The word, ghost, can mean any kind of a scary apparition. They cried out, for they were terrified. Perhaps they did not recognize Jesus at first.

**Immediately (again), right away,** Jesus spoke to them, "Take Courage; it is I, do not be afraid.". **Take courage is a present command, so Jesus was saying, "Keep on being courageous."** Then Jesus added, **"Do not be afraid," which is also a present command telling the disciples to not be continually afraid or to stop being afraid.**

Jesus got into the boat, and the wind stopped. The disciples were astonished – amazed, besides themselves.

Then notice Mark 6:52, "For they had not gained any insight from the incident of the loaves, but their heart was hardened."

Obviously the true account of the feeding of the 5000 and Jesus walking on the water to His disciples struggling in a boat to row across the Sea of Galilee are linked together.

What was Jesus seeking to teach His disciples and in so doing teach us today?

### **3. The teaching for us.**

Certainly, Jesus was seeking to deepen and expand the faith of the disciples in their challenges. He wants to do that for us in our challenges as well.

- 1. Our extremity is always Jesus' opportunity to go to bat for us.**
- 2. Jesus wants to take what we have and use it for His glory as we trust in Him.**
- 3. Jesus wants to multiply what we have for His purposes to advance His eternal kingdom on earth.**
- 4. Jesus wants us to learn to trust Him at all times, whether it's in a storm or not.**
- 5. Jesus wants us to know that He is there to provide us the stability of His presence, and fill us with faith when we don't feel courageous and are afraid.**
- 6. Jesus wants us to understand that He always has the last word as He we trust Him – He is God – He is sovereign.**
- 7. In our negative challenges, God always sees the good, the positive that He wants to do to cause our faith to grow and trust Him more.**

**In Mark 4, the disciples experienced Christ's great teaching. Then they experienced a storm with Jesus in the boat with them. They awoke Jesus and He stilled the storm.**

**Now the disciples in Mark 6 had experienced the miracles of Christ through them as they ministered in pairs in this chapter. Then they saw Jesus miraculously multiplying the bread and fish.**

**All of a sudden they were in a storm again. God was using the negative experiences to deepen their faith in Him. They trusted Christ to do miracles through them, but they had not arrived yet of trusting Him with their very lives. They needed more time to learn who Jesus really was, and what He could do in and through them. That would happen in time.**

**In the negative challenges, Jesus wanted the disciples to learn to trust Him, and let Him bring forth the good, while deepening their faith in Him through those challenging times.**

**God balances the blessings and the burdens to cause us to keep trusting Him, to deepen our faith, regardless of the circumstances. He wants us to trust Him with our very lives. When we do that, we will trust in Him to help and empower us in whatever challenge we face in life. Jesus wants us to understand that He always has the last word, and as we trust Him we experience that He is God – He is sovereign.**

**Jesus is telling us in our challenges, "Keep being courageous in ME. Let your fear be turned into faith in ME."**

**The story is told of twin boys.** One was a confirmed pessimist and the other a habitual optimist. In their tenth birthday, their parents selected presents they hoped would balance out the boys' developing dispositions.

For the pessimist, they wrapped up a bicycle, a remote control airplane, and a large box of chocolates.

For the optimist, they arranged to have a local landscaper dump a massive pile of manure on the driveway.

In the morning, the parents were shocked to see the pessimist crying and sobbing. "Are you trying to kill me?" he shrieked. "I'll probably wreck the bicycles, crash the airplane, and rot my teeth out with the candy!"

In the meantime, they heard shouts of joy from out on the driveway, where the optimist was busily digging in the pile of manure.

"Why are you so happy?" his Dad and Mom asked.

"I just know that there has to be a pony underneath all this mess!" he exclaimed.

**May we let our Lord turn our negative challenges into positive experiences so that our faith in HIM will deepen and grow stronger making our lives more effective for HIM as we live for Him and serve Him each day!!**