

## 6. Jesus in His Hometown, the Limited Commission, the Death of John, the Loaves and Fishes, and Walking on Water

Once upon the west bank of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus proceeds to his hometown, Nazareth. The home folks meet him in ways one might not expect. Before going to the Nazareth episodes, it will help to summarize the attitudes of the people that he has met so far.

Mark 1:22-23: "22 The people **were amazed at his teaching**, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

Mark 1:27: "27 The people **were all so amazed** that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him."

Mark 2:6-7: "6 Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, **thinking to themselves**, 7 "Why does this fellow talk like that? **He's blaspheming!** Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Mark 2:12: 12 He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. **This amazed everyone and they praised God**, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:23-24: 24 The Pharisees said to him, "Look, **why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?**"

Mark 3:2-3: 2 Some of them were **looking for a reason to accuse Jesus**, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.

Mark 3:6: 6 Then the Pharisees went out and **began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus**.

Mark 3:21: 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, **for they said, "He is out of his mind."**

Mark 3:22: 22 And the teachers of the law who came down from Jerusalem said, "**He is possessed by Beelzebub!** By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."

Mark 5:15-16: When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and **they were afraid**.

Mark 5:17: Then the people began to **plead with Jesus to leave their region**.

Mark 5:39-40: 39 He went in and said to them, "Why all this commotion and wailing? The child is not dead but asleep." **40 But they laughed at him**.

The longer Jesus is around the more disenchanted the people become. In spite, of the great wonders performed, the beginnings of rejection and ultimate assassination emerge. He will find it doubly so in his hometown.

### **Jesus in His Hometown**

Mark 6:1-3

*6 Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. 2 When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed.*

*"Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that*

he even does miracles! 3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.

The people at the hometown synagogue were amazed, but in this case, the amazement led to six rhetorical questions. As with others they noted his wisdom, wondering where he got the things that he said. And oh, yes, he even does miracles. How astounded they sound. They recognized him as the carpenter, the son of Mary, brother of Mary's other son and the brother of her daughters. How can he be anyone special, they seem to be saying. "And they took offense at him" may indicate that the thought him to be uppity.

"Isn't this the carpenter," states an acknowledgement by the people of Jesus as a common tradesman, following his father Joseph in that profession. That carpentry in that day required the strength to fell trees and dress lumber

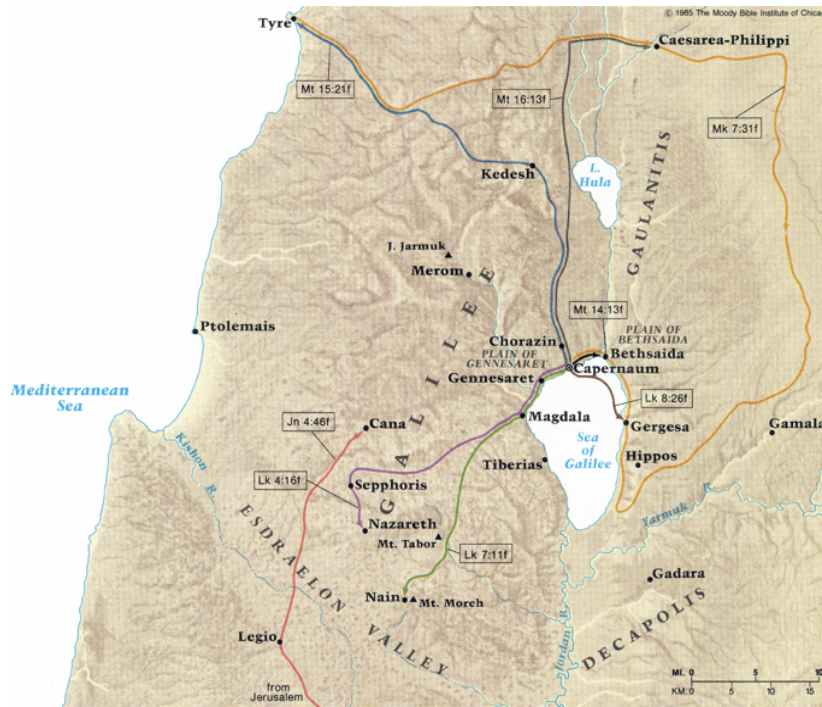
by hand testifies to the fact that Jesus must have been physically strong and muscular; and not weak and slight as some artist depict. Luke describes Jesus as he grew up in Luke 2:52: "52 And Jesus grew in wisdom and **stature** and in favor with God and men." Jesus was physically strong enough to single handedly drive those selling in the temple and the money changers with them out of the temple. John 2:13-16 offers the most details of his strength and commanding presence in driving out these people:

13 When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple courts he found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. 15 So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 To those who sold doves he said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!"

4 Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." 5 He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. 6 And he was amazed at their lack of faith.

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

In his wisdom, Jesus lays down a precept true for all time. John had recorded the principle in words that are used commonplace today in John 4:44-45: "44 (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)" Now it is Jesus turn to be amazed, because of their lack of faith.



## **The Limited Commission**

Mark 6:7-13

*7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits.*

*8 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff – no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them."*

*12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*

The limited commission sent the apostles two by two to preach that people should repent. The Lord gave them authority over evil spirits and power to heal people. These miraculous gifts were to confirm that their word was truly the word of the Lord. The limited commission stands in contrast to the great commission where the apostles were to preach the gospel to the whole creation. The two commissions have in common the accompaniment of the spirituals to confirm their preaching as the true word of God. Mark records in Mark 16:20: "20 Then the disciples went out and preached everywhere, and the Lord worked with them and confirmed his word by the signs that accompanied it."

The instruction: "11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them," holds true today. We must preach and teach, but we cannot compel people to obey.

## **King Herod and John the Baptist**

Mark 6:14-16

*14 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."*

*15 Others said, "He is Elijah."*

*And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago."*

*16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"*

The story of the death of John the Baptist is at once compelling and interesting and at the same time gruesome and wicked. Perhaps there is no story so shrouded with evil. King Herod, who was awful in his wickedness, was a son of Herod the Great and tetrarch of Galilee, according to Luke 3:1-3:

3 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene— 2 during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert.

The subdividing of the kingdom of Herod the Great had left Herod's son Antipas the tetrarch in position to play a historic role in the demise of both John the Baptist and Jesus the Lord and Savior. In the present context, Herod has John beheaded. Later he will play a significant role in the death of the Lord, according to Luke 23:6-12:

6 On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. 7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

8 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. 9 He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. 10 The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him. 11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. 12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends – before this they had been enemies.

This very act of belittling the Lord and playing up to Pilate will lead to the downfall of Herod, since it placed him on the side of Tiberius the reigning Roman. Later, when Tiberius died Caligula became Emperor, and his own nephew Agrippa, brother of Herodias, he made king of Antipas' extended territory. Antipas was exiled to Gaul, The place of his exile is given by Josephus' *Antiquities* as "Lugdunum" in Gaul. (This may mean the city of Lugdunum now known as Lyon.)

Herod, showing his superstition insisted that Jesus was John the one whom he had beheaded raised from the dead.

Mark 6:17-26

17 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. 18 For John had been saying to Herod, "It is not lawful for you to have your brother's wife." 19 So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, 20 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.

The rub with John whom he liked came about when John preached against the adulterous marriage to Herodias. Antipas had married the daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea. On a visit to Rome he stayed with his half-brother Herod Philip II and there fell in love with Philip's wife, Herodias. Herod feared and protected John against the grudge held by Herodias.

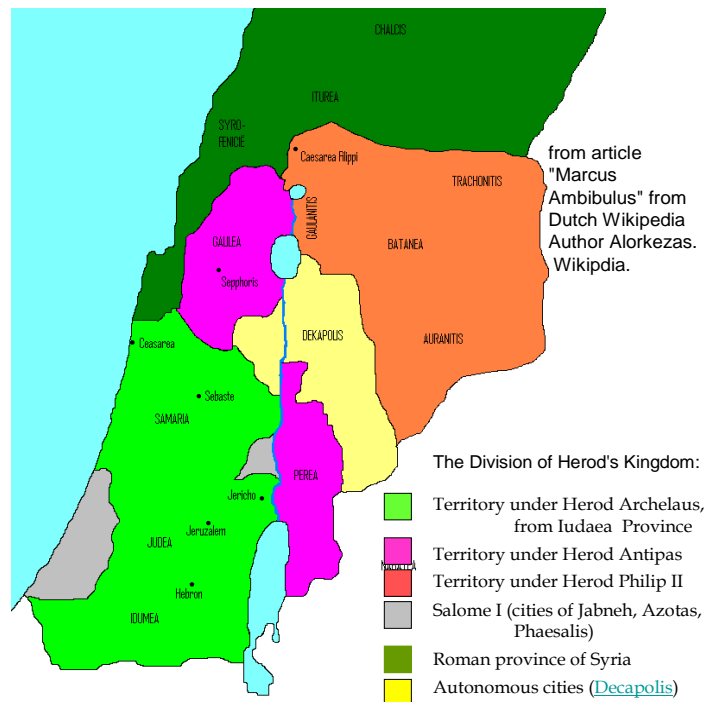
Mark 6:21-26

21 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. 22 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." 23 And he promised her with an oath, "Whatever you ask I will give you, up to half my kingdom."

24 She went out and said to her mother, "What shall I ask for?"

"The head of John the Baptist," she answered.



25 *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."*

26 *The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. 27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.*

The story speaks for itself. Herod was willing to give up to half his kingdom for the favor of Herodias' daughter. All of this occurred prior to Christ expressing his intent to build his church. In Matthews account, the beheading of John the Baptist occurs in Matt 14. Matthew 14:13ff tells the story. However, in Matthew 16, Jesus says that he will build his church. In Matt 16:18-20, the Lord declared his intent:

18 *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. 19 I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."*

Chronologically, there is no way that John could have founded the church.

### ***The Return of the Apostles***

Mark 6:30-36

30 *The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."*

32 *So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When 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.*

35 *By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat."*

One can only imagine the scene—the apostles returning, people gathering around, the Lord listening to their report. They were so busy and pressed by the crowd that they did not even have a chance to eat. Then Jesus realized their need for rest and quite. The lesson is clear for today: Christians must take time to rest. *Burning the candle at both ends* is always a mistake even if we do it in the name of the Lord. Rest and recreation are an important part of the Christian life.

However, the people ran ahead of them and Jesus began teaching. The disciples notice that it was late in the day and implored that he send the people away to buy them something to eat.

### ***The Miracle of Loaves and Fishes***

Mark 6:37-44

37 *But he answered, "You give them something to eat."*

*They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?"*

38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see."

When they found out, they said, "Five – and two fish."

39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking 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 set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

This example of Jesus power is accentuated by the number of people fed (5,000) from five loaves and two fish. Now we see Jesus with power over matter and the ability to create new matter in vast quantities. From nothing came something. No big bang, no slow evolution of those loaves and fishes; but they appeared by Christ's power of creation. This miracle, more than any other, demonstrates the power of the eternal son of God: the power to create the heavens and earth. John wrote in John 1:1-3:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.

3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.

In Mark 8:1-10, Jesus will repeat the miracle of creating bread and feed 4,000 people

### ***Walking on Water***

Mark 6:45-56

45 Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. 46 After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray.

47 When evening came, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. 48 He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. About the fourth watch of the night he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, 49 but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, 50 because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." 51 Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, 52 for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

53 When they had crossed over, they landed at Gennesaret and anchored there. 54 As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. 55 They ran throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56 And wherever he went – into villages, towns or countryside – they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak, and all who touched him were healed.

The miracle of walking on the water demonstrates Jesus power over the laws that govern the material world. In this case, he has power over gravity, which would demand that he sink, being heavier than the water that holds him. These miracles taken together show how hard it was to get the disciples to believe. In verse 50, when they see him, they are terrified. In verse 51, they were completely amazed? In verse 52, they did not understand about the loaves, because their hearts were hardening.

Mark 6 closes with Jesus continuing to heal the sick wherever he goes.