



7. Mark 6:6b-8:30

The traditional symbol for the evangelist Mark was the winged lion, as seen here in stained glass

The Galilean Ministry concludes, opposition increases, and the disciples' faith grows even as they misunderstand.

Structure of 6:6b-8:30

- "And he went about the villages, teaching." (6:6b, **transitional summary report**)
- **The Twelve and John** (6:7-30, **narrative**)
 - **Great Deeds 1** (6:31-56, **miracle stories**)
 - **Christ on Pharisaic Traditions** (7:1-23, **conflict narrative** emphasizing the "hollowness" of the traditions sits at the center of this chiasmus)
 - **Great Deeds 2** (7:24-8:26, **miracle stories**)
- **Peter's Declaration** (8:27-30, **narrative with a saying of Peter**)

The Twelve and John (6:7–30)

- **The Mission of the Twelve:** “And he called unto him the twelve, and began to send them forth by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits...” (6:7–13, call narrative)
 - The Twelve dispatched with authority (“power”) to do the deeds that Christ was performing
 - “Shake off the dust” (6:11), expanded the symbolism of a Jewish custom of traveling Jews determined not to contaminate their homeland
 - “they went out, and preached that men should repent” (6:12)
- The Death of John the Baptist (6:14–29)
 - Confusion over who Christ is—**John the Baptist revived** (preaching repentance), **Elijah** (working miracles), one of the prophets
 - Herod Antipas and the execution of John
 - tetrarch, not king, of Galilee and Perea (4 B.C. – A.D. 39)
 - A weak, **Ahab-type** dependant upon his wife (cf. 1 Kings 21:1-16, connects John with the Elijah story)
- **The Return of the Twelve** (6:30)
 - Only secure use of the term “apostle” in Mark; otherwise just the Twelve or disciples . . .
 - Closes the frame, binding the story of the end of John’s mission with the beginning of a new mission

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Great Deeds 1 (6:31–56, miracle stories)

- **Feeding the Five Thousand** (6:31–44; on the Jewish side)
 - In a “desert” place, once again wilderness image for communing with God
 - People gather from “every” city
 - Christ had compassion “for they were sheep without a shepherd”
 - 200 denarii = wages for 200 days’ labor!
 - Recalls Israel’s miraculous sustenance by God during the Exodus (cf. Ex. 16:13-35; Num. 11:1-35)
 - Prefigures the great eschatological messianic feast (Is. 25:6-8; D&C 24:5-14)
 - 12 baskets of fragments collected suggests the gathering of Israel in the new kingdom
- **Walking on Water** (6:45–52; second, stormy voyage to the Gentile side)
 - Sent disciples ahead while he “departed into a mountain to pray”
 - “He cometh unto them, walking on the sea, and would have passed them.” (6:48)
 - Passing by: God’s veiled self-disclosure to Moses (Ex. 33:18-23) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12)
 - “Be of good cheer: **it is I**; be not afraid.” (6:50)
 - Cf. John’s use of the divine “I Am” (Ex. 3:13-15; Is. 41:4)
 - “For they considered (understood) not the miracle of the loaves: for their hearts were hardened.” (6:52)
- **Healing the Sick at Gennesaret** (6:53–56)
 - “the border of his garment,” the traditional fringe or tassel representing the law (Deut. 22:12; Num. 15:37-41); cf. the faith of the woman with the issue of blood (5:28-29)

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Christ on Pharisaic Traditions (7:1–23)

- Extended **conflict** or **controversy narrative** with Pharisees and scribes “come from Jerusalem”
 - Framing of the controversy over the traditions of the elders by blocks of text treating **great deeds** highlights the teachings given here
 - Nevertheless, Mark’s geography has the Pharisees and scribes come to Jesus while on the “Gentile side” of the Sea of Galilee!
- Offending action: disciples **eat bread with unwashed hands** (7:2)
 - **Lexical resonance with the miraculous feeding of the 5,000**
 - Verse 3’s explanation of the custom presumes non-Jewish audience
 - tradition of the elders = the Pharisaic oral law
- “Howbeit in vain do they worship me, **teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.**” (7:7)
 - The example of *corban* (dedicating something as a religious gift)
- “There is nothing from without, that entering into a man, can defile him, which is food; but **the things which come out of him; those are they that defile the man, that proceedeth forth out of the heart.**” (7:15 JST)
 - A - Purity of heart is seeking what God seeks (7:6)
 - B - Human teachings are worthless (7:7)
 - B’ - Teachings of the elders nullify God’s word (7:9–13)
 - A’ - Only evil from the heart defiles (7:14–23)

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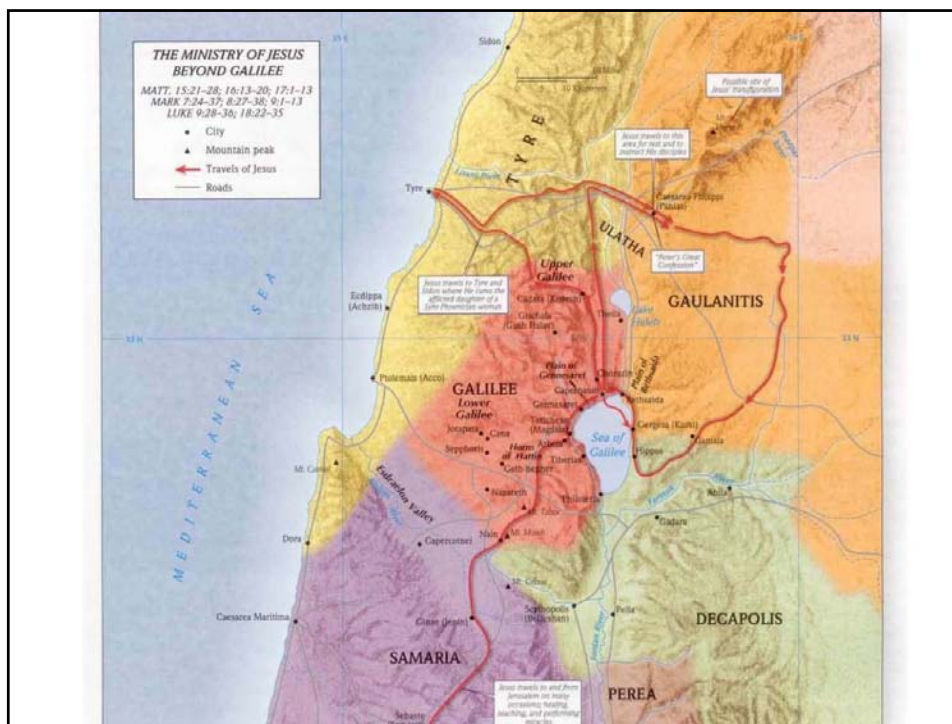
Transition Back to Deeds (7:24, transition narrative)

- 7:22-23 JST “And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon, and entered into a house, and would that no man should come unto him. **But he could not deny them; for he had compassion upon all men.**”
 - Deeds motivated again by **compassion**

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Great Deeds 2 (7:24–8:26, miracle stories)

- **Exorcizing the Daughter of the Syrophenecian Woman** (7:24–30)
 - Travels from “Gentile side” to territory of Tyre and Sidon (still Gentile)
 - Children and dogs . . .
- **Curing the Deaf Man** (7:31–37)
 - In Decapolis, a Gentile region Mark’s audience could still relate to
- **Feeding the Four Thousand** (8:1–9)
 - Wilderness setting again
 - Some see the 7 baskets (cf. the twelve in the feeding of the Five Thousand) as **symbolic of the Gentiles**
- **Controversy with the Pharisees** (8:10–22)
 - Jesus travels back to the “Jewish side” of the Sea of Galilee
 - Demand for a sign (8:11–13)
 - The Yeast of the Pharisees and Herod (8:14–21)
 - Religious and political opposition?
 - 8:18-21 on symbolism of **twelve and seven baskets of bread fragments**, “**How is it that you do not understand?**”

Jesus Cures a Blind Man . . . *In Stages* (8:22–26)

- Connects with the spiritual **blindness of the disciples in the previous pericope**
 - Application of hands and saliva is a Marcan detail absent in similar stories in Matthew and Luke
- **Spiritual symbolism of giving and improving sight . . .**
 - The healing is not at first complete
 - “. . . he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, **I see men as trees, walking.** After that **he put his hands again** upon his eyes, and made him look up: and **he was restored, and saw every man clearly.**” (8:23–25)
 - **the only example where Jesus needs to “fine tune” a miracle**
 - **Looks forward to the disciples’ gradually seeing and understanding who Jesus is and what he will do**

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Peter’s Declaration (8:27–30)

- “. . . by the way he asked **his disciples**, saying unto them, ‘Whom do men say that I am?’ And they answered, ‘John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets.’”
 - **Peter and the disciples** here serve as the end frame for this section, looking back to the opening pericope of **The Twelve and John** (6:7-30)
- “And he saith unto them, ‘But whom say ye that I am?’ And **Peter answereth and saith unto him, ‘Thou art the Christ.’**”
 - The parallel in Matthew 16:13-20 is much expanded, discussing Peter’s role, the Church, the “rock” upon which it is built, and the keys that make the imminent Transfiguration more explicable
 - **Mark focuses only on Jesus . . .**
 - **First time in this gospel that Jesus is designated “Christ”**
 - **Peter knows who Jesus is but does not yet fully understand what he will do (he is still somewhat “blind”)**
- “And **he charged them that they should tell no man of him.**”
 - Why the seeming “**Messianic Secret**” again?
 - Witherington, *GM*, 240, “A title without a context of interpretation, especially the new interpretation that Jesus wanted to give it, was worthless.”

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