

5 How Jesus uses his authority (6:1–7:23)

The first five chapters of Mark's Gospel ask one big question: "Who is this?"

Jesus is the Messiah (1:1) who restores God's reign (1:2-3), the leader who renews God's people (1:8), the Son anointed by heaven (1:10-11) who defeats the enemy for his people (1:13). He is the good news of the kingdom in person (1:15), the Son of Man with authority to release us from sin's crippling effects (2:10), the doctor who restores rejected people (2:17), the Lord of the Sabbath (2:27), the God-appointed leader of the human family (3:35), the farmer replanting the earth for God's harvest (4:14), the ruler who commands even the restless sea (4:41). His authority extends beyond the Jews to the most desperate cases (5:19), and he overturns uncleanness and death in Israel (5:29, 42).

Does Mark's account of Jesus' kingship fill you with hope for the world?

5.1 Jesus as one of us (6:1-6)

The people of Nazareth saw Jesus only in terms of the family he grew up in:

Mark 6:1-6a (NIV)

¹ 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? What are these remarkable miracles he is performing?" 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.

⁴ Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour except in his own town, among his relatives and in his own home." ⁵ He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them.

⁶ He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Society in the first century was much more collective, less individualistic than ours. That sense of belonging and of living for the group is essential to the kingdom of God, but the collective approach has its weaknesses too. Most notably, they could not see the calling God had placed on Jesus as Messiah because they could not see Jesus through any other lens than the place his society had assigned to him.

"*Isn't this the carpenter?*" they ask (verse 3). The word (*tektōn*) was not specific to those who worked with wood, so *builder* would be a better translation:

In a land of omnipresent stone and few trees, a craftsman worked primarily in stone, and much less in wood or metal. Such a craftsman is called "a builder," and he worked on all the structures mentioned by

Jesus in his parables, as described above, as well as wine-presses, millstones, olive press stones, tomb stones, cisterns, farm terraces, vineyards, watch towers, house extensions, etc.²⁵

The point is that they cannot see Jesus as anything but what his family defined him to be. Their *lack of faith* (verse 6) is their inability to recognize Jesus as God's Messiah and therefore to give him their loyalty as God's appointed leader for his people.

5.2 Twelve messengers with his authority (6:6-13)

So how does Jesus spread the good news that God's kingdom is arriving in him? He travels among the people. Then he gives his ambassadors authority to do what he was doing: enacting the fall of the reign of evil, the arrival of the reign of God:

Mark 6:6b-13 (NIV)

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village.

⁷ Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure 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 shirt.

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, leave that place and shake the dust off your feet 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.

In that society, it was a matter of honour for the community to look after the servants of the king who came to visit them and bring them news. King Jesus instructs his agents to travel light, relying on the community's hospitality (verses 8-9).

If the town will not provide hospitality, Jesus says to leave without taking anything—not even dust! Shaking out a garment was a way to provide evidence that you had nothing that belonged to the other person (compare Nehemiah 5:13), and shaking off the dust was a testimony to the town that you were taking nothing from that place (verse 11). That's not how Herod's servants would have reacted!

Jesus' agents called people to turn back to God in preparation for receiving the king God had sent them (verse 12). By driving out demons, they demonstrated that evil was losing its grip. By anointing people with oil, they represented the anointed ruler who cares for his people (verse 13).

²⁵ Ken M. Campbell, “What Was Jesus' Occupation?” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48:3 (2005): 519.

5.3 Kings in contrast (6:14-44)

The next story is about King Herod providing a meal for the rich and powerful, a meal that ends up revealing the power behind his reign (6:14-29). Then Jesus provides a meal for his followers, a meal that reveals the power behind his reign (6:30-44).

First, King Herod. This is **Herod Antipas**, the son of Herod the Great who killed the Bethlehem babies when Jesus was born (Matthew 2). After Herod the Great died, the region was divided under four rulers. During Jesus' adult life, Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and his brother Philip ruled the region to the north and east.

Jesus sent his twelve ambassadors throughout Galilee to enact the restoration of the kingdom of God (verses 7-13). That feels threatening for Herod:

Mark 6:14-16 (NIV)

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, whom I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!"

There's quite a story behind why Herod imprisoned and eventually executed John:

Mark 6:17-20 (NIV)

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.

Mark shows some sympathy for Herod. Herod is not the enemy; he's more of a puppet in service to the power of evil (as in Ephesians 6:12).

Mark 6:21-22a (NIV)

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.

Birthdays don't feature much in Scripture. This was an opportunity for Herod to celebrate himself. Herod throws a party in his honour, a great banquet with the best

entertainment, for all the important people in Galilee. Herod wants everyone to know what a great guy he is, and how generously he rewards those who please him:

Mark 6:22b-25 (NIV)

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.”



Herod's birthday feast. Painting by Edward Armitage (1868)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herod%27s_Birthday_Feast

Herod's birthday has suddenly taken a macabre twist. If he agrees, no one will remember the platters of the best food Galilee can offer in celebration of their generous king. The image seared in their minds will be the decapitated head of one who opposed Herod.

Mark 6:26-28 (NIV)

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.

Trapped in an evil beyond his control, Herod orders the execution of God's prophet.

John the Baptist's head arrives on a serving platter. Even in death, John is making one last prophetic statement. Every guest sees the real power behind Herod's claim to kingship: the power of death. It's through death that Herod reigns.

That's the nature of power in this world. That's the world God is rescuing by sending his Messiah. But if the rulers have done this to one who was merely a spokesman for God, what will they do to God's anointed ruler (the *Christ*)?

Mark 6:29-31 (NIV)

²⁹ On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb.

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.”

Unlike Herod, Jesus has none of the trappings of kingship. He's not surrounded by *high officials, and military commanders and the leading men of Galilee* (verse 21). Yet people are so drawn to his leadership that *they did not even have a chance to eat* (verse 31, compare 3:20). He proposes escaping to a quiet place where they might be safe. taking time to process what just happened.

Mark 6:32-34 (NIV)

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.

People are so hungry for the kind of leadership Jesus provides! Six hundred years they'd been *sheep without a shepherd* (verse 34). Earthly leaders like Herod cannot save them. Only God's Anointed can restore us. People are hungry for his way of life. Listening to Jesus, nobody wants to go home.

Mark 6:35-37 (NIV)

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 that they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.”

³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.”

They 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 it to them to eat?”

The need we see around us always feels overwhelming. We're servants of King Jesus, providing his care for people in his earthly realm, but the scale of the need is beyond us: in our currency, it would take tens of thousands of dollars to provide one basic meal for all these people (verse 37).

Mark 6:38-44 (NIV)

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 distribute to 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.

Jesus asks, "What do you have?" He takes what we have, and makes it enough. This is a radically different economy to Herod. Herod taxed the people so he could pay for the armies and infrastructure. In the kingdom of Old Testament times, people paid a tithe to the temple plus whatever taxes their rulers required (e.g. 1 Kings 4:21; 2 Kings 3:4; 17:3-4; 23:33-35). But instead of levying taxes on us, King Jesus calls us to participate in caring for his people. That's how the kingdom of God works.

We pray, "Give us this day our daily bread." (Matthew 6:11), and we share with each other all that God provides. In the kingdom of the resurrected Lord, *no one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had, revealing God's grace so powerfully at work in them that there were no needy persons among them* (Acts 4:32, 34).



We do this together, under the leadership of King Jesus. Everybody eats (verse 42), and there are leftovers! (verse 43).

We'll never have a budget big enough to match the need, but we do have a God big enough to provide for everyone. The one who provides for the sower is the one who brings the harvest for the whole earth.

The miracle of the feeding of the 5000 reveals the life-giving source behind Jesus' kingship. It's not a kingdom established by killing his enemies but by giving his own life. The only blood the Messiah shed to establish this kingdom was his own.

What a contrast to Herod's feast! Based on these two meals, how would you describe the difference between Herod's authority and Jesus'?

	Herod's meal (6:14-29)	Jesus' meal (6:30-44)
What food was provided?	<i>gourmet banquet</i>	<i>basic (fish & bread)</i>
What was the setting?	<i>comfortable palace</i>	
Who were the guests?		
What entertainment?		
Purpose of the event?		
Who provided the food?		
What power was revealed behind each king's reign?		

Can you recall a previous time when God's people were escaping a tyrant, and God provided bread for them in the wilderness? (Hint: Exodus 16.)

5.4 The one who rules the sea (6:45-56)

This night the disciples were rowing hard, struggling to make headway through the sea, because the wind was against them. That changed when Jesus came to them:

Mark 6:45-52 (NIV)

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 Later that night, 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. Shortly before dawn 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.

What does verse 52 mean? What was it that *they had not understood about the loaves*? It seems the disciples were like everyone else: *ever hearing but never understanding* (3:11-12). They have not yet recognized Jesus as God’s anointed ruler (8:29).

Just as God came to his struggling people in Exodus, Jesus came to his struggling disciples. God was leading Jacob’s family out of tyranny, but they got stuck at the Red Sea until *Your path led through the sea, your way through the mighty waters, though your footprints were not seen* (Psalm 77:19). That’s what Jesus is doing for them.

Jesus had provided bread in the wilderness, exactly as God had done in Exodus 16. Now he was giving them passage through the sea. Once again God was saving his people.

Mark 6:53-56 (NIV)

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 it were healed.

Gennesaret was just southwest of Capernaum. Jesus is well known there. Although Jesus is not wearing the robes of a king, he fulfils the task of caring for his people.

5.5 What defiles God's people? (7:1-23)

Washing with water was the ritual provided by the Torah for people who'd become unclean (Leviticus 13–15). Pharisees extended these requirements to other situations where they feared uncleanness would capture God's people:

Mark 7:1-5 (NIV)

¹ The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law who had come from Jerusalem gathered around Jesus ² and saw some of his disciples eating food with hands that were **defiled**, that is, unwashed. ³ (The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders. ⁴ When they come from the marketplace they do not eat unless they wash. And they observe many other traditions, such as the washing of cups, pitchers and kettles.)

⁵ So the Pharisees and teachers of the law asked Jesus, “Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with **defiled** hands?”

We practice hand-washing for a very different reason. Before microscopes were invented in the 1590s, no one knew about germs. Experience taught them that people were less likely to get sick if they washed before eating, but they didn't know the reason. It was more about cultural norms, traditions, and fears.

They connected unclean food with unclean spirits. Eating unclean food made a person ritually unclean (Leviticus 11). The Pharisees worried that if you touched something unclean in the market, you could end up with an unclean spirit on your hands. Then if you ate without performing the cleansing ritual, you might swallow the evil spirit and it would then be living inside you. We'll see how Jesus' response confronts that fear (verses 14-23).

They already accused Jesus of having an impure spirit (3:30). Now they confront him publicly to frighten others away from following his example instead of their rules.

Mark 7:6-8 (NIV)

⁶ He replied, “Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written:

“ ‘These people honour me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.

⁷ They worship me in vain;
their teachings are merely human rules.’ [Isaiah 29:13]

⁸ You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

Religious people regularly add their own rules to God's.
But our rules have a habit of overturning what God said:

Mark 7:9-13 (NIV)

⁹ And he continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! ¹⁰ For Moses said, ‘Honour your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ [Exodus 20:12 and 21:17] ¹¹ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— ¹² then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. ¹³ Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

After reporting how Jesus responded to the Pharisees, Mark draws our attention to the deeper issue of whether what we eat can defile us. This is still a big topic for Mark's audience thirty years after these events.

Mark 7:14-23 (NIV)

¹⁴ Again Jesus called the crowd to him and said, “Listen to me, everyone, and understand this.

¹⁵ Nothing outside a person can **defile** them by going into them. Rather, it is what comes out of a person that **defiles** them.”

¹⁷ After he had left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples asked him about this parable. ¹⁸ “Are you so dull?”

he asked. “Don't you see that nothing that enters a person from the outside can **defile** them? ¹⁹ For it doesn't go into their heart but into their stomach, and then out of the body.” **(In saying this, Jesus declared all foods clean.)**

²⁰ He went on: “What comes out of a person is what **defiles** them.

²¹ For it is from within, out of a person's heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, ²² adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and **defile** a person.”

According to Jesus, what you eat does not make you unclean. You won't get an unclean spirit because of what you eat. His argument is basic biology: food goes to the stomach, where the body digests what's useful, and excretes what's not.



Source: <https://www.tasteofhome.com/article/kosher-cooking-2/>

At the time, Jesus was speaking to the people of the Sinai covenant who still needed to obey the kosher food laws. Yet, Jesus' teaching laid the foundation for a new covenant where being clean in God's eyes has nothing to do with what kind of food we eat.

That's what Mark said by adding his explanation in verse 19. In the new covenant, we do not become unclean in God's sight by eating particular foods. We are free to eat foods that would have made people unclean under the Sinai covenant. As with the Sabbath (Mark 2:28), the food laws are not a requirement of the new covenant.²⁶

5.6 Conclusion

How is Jesus' teaching shaping the way you think about the Old Testament? Jesus is the Messiah for the Jewish people as well as for gentiles, but we live under his leadership rather than the Sinai laws. Do you find yourself approaching the Bible like the Pharisees did, or like Jesus did?

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How does the gospel of the Messiah affect your approach to politics? As you read about the difference between the humanly appointed leader (King Herod) and the divinely appointed leader (Messiah Jesus), should Christians be involved in politics or is that a fruitless field that cannot save the world? What are your thoughts?

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What else is challenging the way you think and live as you listen to Jesus' teaching and leadership?

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In preparation for next time, read **Mark 7:24-8:38**.

²⁶ In fact, refusing to eat with brothers and sisters who don't follow the food laws constitutes a rejection of people Christ has accepted (Galatians 2:11-14). We cannot judge each other by what we eat (Romans 14:1-4).