

# HARDENED HEARTS

Mark 6:30-56

We discovered in the previous passage that Herod Antipas misunderstood Jesus because of his guilt (6:14-29). In the passages before us in this study we discover that the disciples missed a major revelation about Jesus because of resentment.

**Mark 6:30-31 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> The apostles returned to Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. <sup>31</sup> And he said to them, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.

After being rejected in His hometown of Nazareth (6:1-6) Jesus sent His disciples out (6:7-13). John Mark “sandwiches” in Herod Antipas’ response to Jesus (6:14-29) then picks up the disciples’ ministry trip again (6:30-31). The disciples returned to Jesus in Capernaum and reported the amazing things they had done and taught in His name.

Do you remember how crazy it was in Capernaum when His family came to take Him away? John Mark tells us there were so many people Jesus and His disciples couldn’t even eat (3:21). As we can see the ministry load hadn’t let up; Jesus and His disciples still couldn’t find space to eat. So Jesus directed they get away to a remote place to rest.

Vance Havner, one of the great preachers and evangelists of the 20th century said about Christian servants, “If you don’t come apart and rest, you will come apart.” Even Jesus and His disciples needed time to rest, to fellowship with one another and be refreshed by the Father.

So they set sail for some R & R.

**Mark 6:32-34 (ESV)**

<sup>32</sup> And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. <sup>33</sup> Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. <sup>34</sup> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

It’s not hard to imagine some groans and choice words from the disciples as they pulled in to shore. There was just no getting away from these people. So much for getting some rest!

When Jesus saw the crowd He was moved with compassion. They *were like sheep without a shepherd*. Neither Herod Antipas nor Judaism’s spiritual leaders were caring for God’s people. “They were like sheep without a shepherd” was an intentional allusion to several Old Testament Scriptures. In Ezekiel 34 God denounces the leaders of Israel as corrupt shepherds; He then declares that He Himself will shepherd Israel.

**Ezekiel 34:11-16 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> “For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out. <sup>12</sup> As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so will I seek out my sheep, and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. <sup>13</sup> And I will

bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land. And I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the ravines, and in all the inhabited places of the country. <sup>14</sup> I will feed them with good pasture, and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. <sup>15</sup> I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I myself will make them lie down, declares the Lord GOD. <sup>16</sup> I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them in justice.

In feeding the five thousand Jesus was revealing Himself to be the divine Shepherd come to restore the flock of Israel.

**Mark 6:35-37 (ESV)**

<sup>35</sup> And when it grew late, his disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the hour is now late. <sup>36</sup> Send them away to go into the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." <sup>37</sup> But he answered them, "You give them something to eat." And they said to him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?"

It's interesting to observe the disciples telling Jesus what to do. Perhaps their frustration was talking. The net result of this exchange was to establish that the disciples did not have the resources to feed this crowd.

It set the stage for Jesus to manifest Himself as Israel's Shepherd.

**Mark 6:38-44 (ESV)**

<sup>38</sup> And he said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they had found out, they said, "Five, and two fish." <sup>39</sup> Then he commanded them all to sit down in groups on the green grass. <sup>40</sup> So they sat down in groups, by hundreds and by fifties. <sup>41</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish he looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. And he divided the two fish among them all. <sup>42</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. <sup>43</sup> And they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. <sup>44</sup> And those who ate the loaves were five thousand men.

This event was rich with imagery reminiscent of God's care for Israel. Were not their fathers, encamped in the wilderness tribe by tribe, row by row, fed by God for forty years? Did not the Lord, David's shepherd, make him to lie down in green pastures and prepare a table before him (Psalm 23)?

On this occasion the divine Shepherd fed His flock out of the abundance of His divine resources. Everyone had plenty to eat with leftovers. John Mark noted that five thousand men were fed. If women and children were also present, this emphasizes the magnitude of this miracle. But there was another reason why John Mark recorded the number of men.

It was a small army capable of mounting an insurrection.

**Mark 6:45-46 (ESV)**

<sup>45</sup> Immediately he made his disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. <sup>46</sup> And after he had taken leave of them, he went up on the mountain to pray.

The word *made* is literally *forced*; immediately after feeding the crowd Jesus forced His disciples to get into the boat and set sail. What is implied here is explicit in the Gospel of John.

John 6:13-15 (ESV)

<sup>13</sup> So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. <sup>14</sup> When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!" <sup>15</sup> Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

It may be that Jesus was concerned His disciples not get caught up in the hysteria and join the crowd in a coup to forcibly install Jesus as king. He acted quickly to separate His disciples and to dismiss the crowd. Then He Himself went up on the mountain to pray.

Mark 6:47-52 (ESV)

<sup>47</sup> And when evening came, the boat was out on the sea, and he was alone on the land. <sup>48</sup> And he saw that they were making headway painfully, for the wind was against them. And about the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. He meant to pass by them, <sup>49</sup> but when they saw him walking on the sea they thought it was a ghost, and cried out, <sup>50</sup> for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." <sup>51</sup> And he got into the boat with them, and the wind ceased. And they were utterly astounded, <sup>52</sup> for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.

Jesus came to them sometime between 3AM - 6AM. When it says ...*He meant to pass by them,*" I think it means in the Old Testament sense that God "passed by" Moses and Elijah assuring both of His favor and presence (Exod. 33:17-23; 1 Kings 19:11-13).

The term *astounded* describes "...a mental condition of being *outside oneself* or of *astonishment* because of amazement or fear.<sup>1</sup>" It is the same verb used to describe Jesus being "out of His mind" as thought by His family (Mark 3:20-21). This was not the response for which Jesus was looking. It was not a response of faith. It was the astonishment of terror not the delighted surprise of faith. As we would say, the "whole Jesus walking on the water thing" scared the disciples "out of their minds".

They were "scared out of their minds" because they did not understand about the loaves – the feeding of the thousands.

What were they to understand?

That Jesus is the promised, divine Shepherd of Israel.

What kept them from seeing this?

John Mark tells us that their hearts were hardened; more accurately, their hearts *had been hardened*. They had been hardened in the sense that on this occasion they were not receptive, not teachable, not open to seeing and embracing what Jesus revealed to them.

<sup>1</sup> Horst Robert Balz and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990-), 7.

What caused their hearts to be hard during the feeding of the five thousand?

Their resentment toward Jesus, the crowd and the whole situation in which their expectations of rest had been spoiled.

Did you notice in the text that it was Jesus who had compassion on the crowd, not Jesus and the disciples? This is an argument from silence, but I think it contributes to an overall sense of the situation. The disciples were the ones who told Jesus to send the crowd away. They seemed irritated by the idea that they were to feed these people.

Perhaps there is a better explanation, but whatever the case, at the time of the feeding of the five thousand, the disciple's hearts were already hard so that they were not open to what Jesus revealed about Himself in this miracle.

Just as Herod Antipas missed Jesus because of his guilt (6:16) the disciples missed this deeper revelation of Jesus the divine Shepherd because of their resentment.

When they landed, the ministry continued with many, many coming to Jesus to be healed.

**Mark 6:53-56 (ESV)**

<sup>53</sup> When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored to the shore. <sup>54</sup> And when they got out of the boat, the people immediately recognized him <sup>55</sup> and ran about the whole region and began to bring the sick people on their beds to wherever they heard he was. <sup>56</sup> And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.

## THINGS TO PONDER

### Jesus is the divine Shepherd of Israel.

Jesus will fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel 34. After the Tribulation, during the Millennial Kingdom, Jesus will gather the sheep of Israel and prosper them in the Promised Land.

### Jesus is our divine Shepherd.

**John 10:14-16 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, <sup>15</sup> just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep. <sup>16</sup> And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.

Day in and day out Jesus is looking out for us and taking care of us just as a good shepherd does his flock.

### How should we handle unmet expectations?

The disciples missed learning about Jesus because they were upset that their expectations weren't met. There was nothing wrong with their expectations; Jesus set up the expectation with His plans to take them away to get some rest.

But things changed. it wasn't anybody's "fault". Jesus didn't lie or mislead His men. The people came and Jesus' compassion towards them was the right response. He sacrificed His wants in order to do the Father's will.

That's hard to do. But in Jesus' example is the answer to handling unmet expectations. Unmet expectations are part of life. My mother's side of the family gathered for a big weekend reunion to celebrate my Aunt's 80th birthday only to have my Aunt fall ill and spend the entire weekend in the hospital. Unmet expectations are part of life and we need to learn how to respond to them in a healthy way or we will become resentful, hard people.

The article that follows is from *Institute in Basic Life Principles*. The key principle in handling the disappointment of unmet expectations...

**... is to yield your expectations and rights to God and to focus on fulfilling your responsibilities.**

That is exactly what Jesus did. The disciples instead hardened their hearts and missed out on the significance of the feeding of the five thousand.

I encourage you to read the following article and take it to heart so that we don't allow unmet expectations to harden our hearts and so miss out on what Jesus wants to do in and through our lives.

## **HOW DO RESPONSIBILITIES RELATE TO PERSONAL RIGHTS AND EXPECTATIONS?**

### **Responsibilities, Rights, and Expectations** *understanding the difference<sup>2</sup>*

Conflicts are usually the result of fumbled responsibilities, trampled rights, and unfulfilled expectations. If you can learn to acknowledge and identify these factors, you'll gain insights into resolving the anger and worry that plague many relationships.

#### **Responsibilities**

A responsibility is **a task that you are asked to perform within a specific role**. For example, a husband is responsible to love his wife. A wife is responsible to honor her husband. Parents are responsible to care for their children. Children are responsible to honor their parents. Employees are responsible to work. Civil officials are responsible to punish wrongdoers.

Your **current life roles determine your responsibilities**. The responsibilities of a child are different than those of a parent or employer. Your success and sense of fulfillment within a role often reflect your faithfulness to fulfill the responsibilities related to that role.

#### **Rights**

A personal right is **a demand that you can make of another and can expect to receive**. In the roles of life where you fulfill responsibilities, you have personal rights.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://iblp.org/questions/how-do-responsibilities-relate-personal-rights-and-expectations>. This material was adapted from pages 99–101 of the *Basic Seminar Follow-Up Course*.

For example, a husband has a right to be respected by his wife. A wife has a right to be loved by her husband. Parents have a right to be honored by their children. Children have a right to be cared for by their parents. Employees have a right to be paid a just wage for their labor. Citizens are entitled to the rights of their citizenship. Your rights are honored when others fulfill their responsibilities.

### **Expectations**

An expectation is an **obligation that you mentally assign to another person**. It is a benefit that you believe is owed to you based on your responsibilities and rights, because of what the other person has said or because of his responsibilities.

For example, a husband might expect his wife to keep an orderly home or serve dinner each evening at a certain time. A wife might expect her husband to regularly take her out on a date. A child might expect his parents to buy him the clothes he needs. Employees might expect to be recognized for exceptional service. Citizens might expect protection and services from the government.

### **Gain a Biblical Perspective**

It's important to carefully **consider your rights and expectations in light of what is true Biblically**. Too often what you perceive as personal rights are actually selfish expectations. Yielding your rights and expectations to God provides an opportunity to discover His perspective regarding what you expect of others.

There are legitimate rights and expectations that children should have of their parents and that parents should have of their children. Husbands and wives also should have expectations of one another. Employers, employees, civilians, and civil authorities also should recognize legitimate rights. A basic secret to harmony, however, is to yield your expectations and rights to God and to **focus on fulfilling your responsibilities**.

If you concentrate only on your rights and leave your responsibilities unfulfilled, you provoke reaction and resentment. By concentrating on your responsibilities toward others, you allow them to enjoy their God-given rights. Your actions free them to fulfill their responsibilities to you so that you, in turn, are able to enjoy your God-given rights.

For example, when a father yields his right and expectation to be respected and concentrates on his responsibility to love his wife and teach his children to be respectful, it is far more likely that he eventually will receive the respect and honor his position deserves. If he doesn't "expect" words and actions that honor him, he will respond with joy and gratitude when he does receive them—thus strengthening the relationships even more.

By yielding your rights and expectations to God, you are making a choice to **trust His sovereignty in all things and look to Him to ultimately meet all of your needs**. The Psalmist David spoke of this trust in Psalm 62:1, 5: *"Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from him cometh my salvation. . . . My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him."*